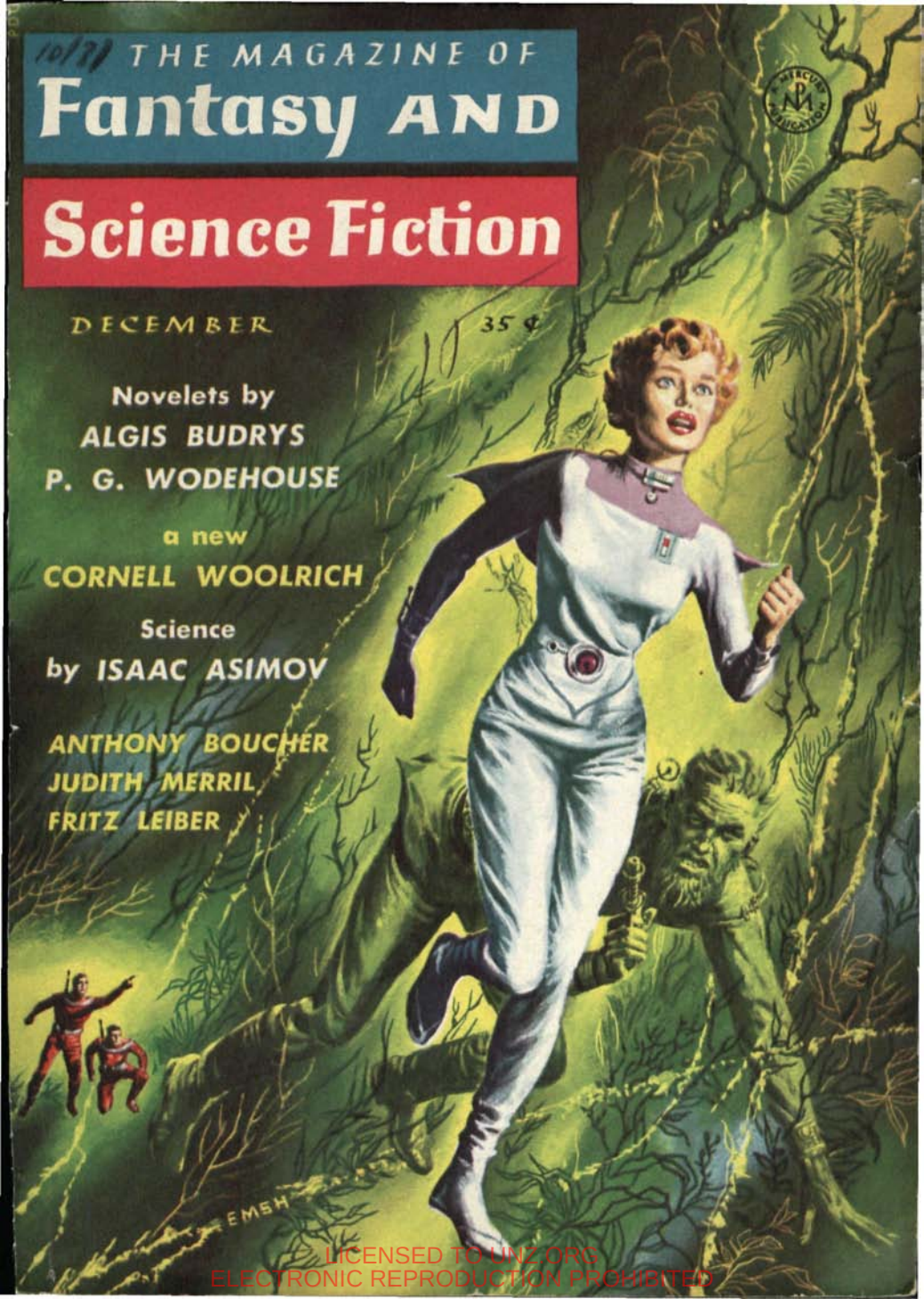

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 15, No. 6 DECEMBER

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Cover by Emsh, illustrating "Dream Girl"

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER — *Robert P. Mills*, EDITOR

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Coming next month...

A zestful, *different* sort of novelet by Fritz Leiber will be featured next month. Entitled *The Silver Eggheads*, it investigates with vigor, wit, and excitement a parlous time when man rises up in wrath against the intellectual machines that sustain him, and finds himself as a result in dire need of a few human brains smart enough to replace them. The complications all this leads to, and the unique problems it poses to a small group of fascinating people, add up to a special treat you shouldn't miss.

Other features include: *Santa Clause*, by Robert F. Young—about a man with a devilish sort of Christmas problem; Dr. Asimov's Science Column, which looks into a somewhat disturbing body of facts on the subject of ice ages, past and future; a short but powerful tale by John Collier; and *The Invasion of the Planet of Love*, a new story by George P. Elliott, whose *Sandra* last year, judging by our mail, caused quite a stir among our readers....

Fritz Leiber, incidentally, was awarded the "Hugo" at the recent World Science Fiction Convention for the best novel of the year, and Avram Davidson won the same award for the best short story. It seems only right, then, that we should include a story by Mr. Davidson—*The Woman Who Thought She Could Read*—to go with Mr. Leiber's novelet. Which makes the January issue of *FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION* a richly decorated affair indeed, since—and we say it as modestly as we know how—F&SF, under the editorship of Anthony Boucher, won the "Hugo" at that same Convention for the best science fiction magazine of the year.

See us next month?

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Algis Budrys is a young writer of increasing stature whose work shows constant change and growth. His inventiveness, characterization-in-depth, and sheer story-telling ability are all in evidence in The Eye and the Lightning, *his first F&SF appearance. It tells of a future in which no man is really safe from his neighbor, and of a peacefully inclined old man who is more concerned with carving a proper face for the evil puppet Rumpelstiltskin than with worrying about the evil intentions of his fellows—until the lightning flashes at him . . .*

The Eye and the Lightning

by Algis Budrys

A MAN SAT HUNCHED FORWARD over the teak coffee table in the living room of his house, thinking about a dream. He was patiently building card houses while he thought, and he was also waiting for hunger enough to make him cook breakfast.

He was a pink-cheeked, aging, solitary man with an innocent air. He lived his life as it came to him, and it seemed to him to be a pleasant one. He was a simple man who saw things in a direct, uncomplicated light. Humming to himself in a tuneful voice, he tilted the edge of one card against the edge of another. When the entire structure collapsed, he scratched the woolly white hair on his chest and began again. He was in no hurry.

It was a cool, pleasant morning here in the house he had dug out of the ground, sheathed, cut and hammered together, furnished and camouflaged as skillfully as any house of his time. A hundred feet overhead, the scrub growth and raw gullies of an impassable wilderness were baking in the sun. Down here, the hidden ventilators caught the shriveling breeze, processed it, and gave him a perfect morning. He was comfortable, well-rested, and at peace.

All over the morning longitudes of Earth, other people in other hidden places were rising. It was not in him to realize that he was by nature happier than any of them.

He was thinking about the

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dream. He had no clear idea of whether he had ever had it before. But, in his innocent's way he thought it interesting that the possibility had occurred to him.

The dream had been full of obvious symbolism:

He had been prowling under a cold, cloud-filled sky with watery moonlight seeping out behind the rolled banks of the clouds. His teeth had been on edge; his muscles tense. He had looked warily to all sides; not all the shadows in the uncertain landscape about him were motionless. He had been waiting for the first misstep by one of those other painstaking shadows. He had been waiting for the first chance to lash out wherever opportunity offered. It seemed to be urgent that he kill as many of them as he could, so that he could be that much more secure in what he now saw was a company of shadows, all moving toward some unknown future in the clouded moonlight.

It gradually came to him that one of those shadows knew him not as another dim and guessed—at shape but as himself. Somewhere in the darkness all around him, one eye did not waver, did not range from side to side, but watched him, and knew him, and glittered with its knowledge.

He had stopped moving forward. He could still remember that a few minutes ago he had been a hunter himself. But not one possessed of such a knowledgeable rapacity. He was terrified.

The eye called his name.

He stood transfixed thus to learn how well his hunter knew him.

The sky cracked open and silent, glassy lightning burst upon him.

From some recess, he took a mask and frantically pulled it over his head.

Peace muffled him. Suddenly he was not afraid. The lightning flickered aimlessly, shrank away and contracted on itself back into the sky. The eye in the darkness looked at his mask without recognition or interest, passed on, and was no longer aware of him. He began moving forward again in concert with the other shadows, safe and known to none of them.

He was so grateful that he forgot, for a long time, that he was under the mask. Then, as he began to lose his fear of the knowing eye, he reached up to lift the mask away. He was already turning his head from side to side, already searching, and the beings around him were drawing fearfully away a little, as if they could sense his mood.

But the mask would not lift. It clung to him like another skin. He tried to close his fingers on it, but its surface was too slippery.

He tried to pry up one edge, but in that long moment of peace and gratitude the mask had somehow

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grown to cover his entire body in one seamless integument. And now its mouth covered his mouth. Its nostrils closed. Its eyes shut. Its ears plugged themselves.

He was helpless inside the mask, which began to walk he knew not where, carrying him smothered inside it.

The aging man built another card house, shaking his head mildly at himself. It troubled him to think that he was not as serene as he might like. But who could blame him, in this world? And it was only a dream.

This morning was a beautiful morning. His life was a succession of nothing but beautiful mornings, and afternoons working on his marionette collection.

He frowned momentarily. He still hadn't been able to decide why his Rumpelstiltskin failed to satisfy him. Then he shrugged. Maybe he'd get it right this afternoon. He smiled. This was the biggest trouble there was in his life, now. The bygone days, when he and every other thinking being on Earth had seen the terror coming —had felt its shape looming at their backs while they struggled to complete their hideaways in time—those were the true nightmare. A dream was a small price to pay for having escaped it.

He nodded to himself. The memory of those first days when it became apparent everyone would soon have a scanner; that there was no stopping its use becoming universal, or the use of the transport and burner components —that memory was certainly enough to account for the dream.

He sighed mildly, in the only mild relief that was all that was necessary, and went back to his cards.

Finally he stopped and said aloud to himself: "Breakfast." He went out into the kitchen, tugging at his shorts. He'd cut and sewn them himself, and they tended to bind. He had never realized this consciously; the tug was a habit. While he tugged at his pants, he broke into absent-minded extemporaneous song:

"Oh, what'll we have for breakfast, breakfast, breakfast? What'll we have for breakfast, on such a lovely day? Shall we have eggs? Yes, we'll have eggs. Bacon, too. But no oyster stew. Oh . . ."

He caught himself as he was about to begin a repeat, and smiled shyly around at anyone who might have been watching or listening. It was highly unlikely anyone was. If someone was, then his life depended on that someone's good will, and that good will, supposing it to be operating now, might be withdrawn at any time. But there was no way of telling. There were only a host of previous precautions to depend on. And since there was no way of telling, there was, really, no

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point in worrying. He reached the kitchen and set water to boil in the kettle.

He went to the refrigerator for butter and eggs. That was when he saw the note to himself propped up against the egg box, where he'd be sure to find it:

BUY NEW KITS TODAY SURE

his block-printing told him. He nodded, taking out two eggs. "I *am* growing absent-minded," he murmured.

He stood still for a moment, trapped by a chain of associative thinking, a little saddened by the fact that, if he wanted to have some little peace of mind, he had to be as concerned about worn scanner parts as anyone else. He hated being taken away from his marionettes by a shopping expedition. He would have liked to let the rig in his bedroom go to frayed ruin and cobwebbed disuse, but he did not quite dare. He had to at least keep watch on the surface overhead, to make sure no one had ventured out to search for ventilator mouths.

Was it absent-mindedness, or unwillingness?

It was so hard for him to be practical, even in a case where his life might be concerned. Hardheadedness did not come naturally to him. It had to be studied consciously, and practiced systematically, despite his longing to live a simple and uncluttered life.

Most people, he knew, would never be content with the small degree of defensive scanning that surfeited him. Most people were constant busy, surreptitiously gathering a snip of personal clothing here, devising elaborate schemes that might not succeed for months, to acquire a bit of someone's skin cells there, straining at any scrap of individual belonging that might be placed in their scanners' identification stages so that the mechanism would have a point of focus. And all the while trembling at the thought that someone might somehow have gotten something of theirs.

The only vector materials the old man had in his scanner were soil samples from overhead and from each of the towns, so that his scanner could show him those areas and so that his transport could take him there. But most people were obsessed with gathering personal data on other people, in desperate hope of discovering someone to watch unseen, and broodingly to watch over with deadly thoughtfulness if they were so inclined.

Most people could not live without the comfort of knowing that, even though they were perhaps themselves naked to someone's unseen eyes, still they in turn held someone else helpless before them. All unaware, helpless — exposed there to be watched, to be listened to, perhaps to be struck

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down without warning by the burner's flare, if their personal habits were sufficiently enraging. Most people lived out their days either before their scanners or hunting for vector data; watching, searching . . . and glancing fearfully back over their shoulders.

Still, what was anyone to do? The aging man shook his head—a gesture he used more often than he realized—and thought pityingly of the circle that had closed around mankind.

But he was only a little saddened by the world this morning. He had lived in it for many years, and thought himself accustomed to it. He took the eggs over to the stove.

After breakfast, he went into his workroom beside the kitchen. He sighed softly as the lights came on and all the little stage sets glittered on the waist-high shelf against the wall. He dimmed the overhead and left the miniature footlights bright.

They were all ready. There was the gingerbread house, with Hansel and Gretel suspended by their nearly invisible strings, their painstakingly carved faces just peeking around the corner, Hansel's hand raised timidly to break off a bit of the eaves. Here was the granite castle tower, with the dragon crouched on the sward and St. George rearing his milk-white charger, lance couchant. On the far shelf, the youngest of the twelve dancing princesses was just disappearing down through the trapdoor in her bedroom, one dainty ankle flirting out from the edge of her full petticoats, a tiny bouquet trailing from her fingertips.

The old man sighed again, his glance lingering over each set; over the Frog Prince; over the naked Emperor being fitted by the rascally tailors; Rapunzel combing her golden hair.

He smiled softly. There were many years of work here; many patient afternoons, with *papier mâché* and paint, with costume cloth, with carving tools taking infinitesimal chips out of the wood until at last the living face peeped out of the grain. And in ample return for this, there was the satisfaction of having created beauty in his own eyes.

His glance fell on the workbench in the corner. There was the set, all ready; the interior of the tower room, and the princess at her wheel trying vainly to spin straw into gold. Lying on the bench beside it was an uncompleted head, waiting to be finished and joined to the finished dwarf body.

Rumpelstiltskin. The old man shook his head. How many times had he tried to make a head for Rumpelstiltskin?

He went to the bench and picked up the latest rough carv-

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ing. He held it to the light, discontented.

The gnomish, twisted face leered up at him. But there was no life in it, and there would never be. Misshapen ears and a nose askew, broad, twisted lips and sunken cheeks did not describe the evil of the dwarf. The essence of him was not in this caricature—he was ugly, but ugliness was not what made him what he was. What did?

The old man put the head down. He didn't know. Perhaps it was beyond him.

He picked the head up again, and teased at it tentatively with a miniature knife. But he was only fumbling. There was no surety in his hand. He was wasting his time; trying to force an understanding he had not yet come to. He dropped knife and head, and wandered restlessly out of the room.

Perhaps he'd better go to town and get it over with. He was doing himself no good here.

Accordingly, at about ten, wearing a shapeless, varicolored loose robe with a hood, velvet slippers and a featureless starched blue cotton mask, he stepped out of his transport's field in the side alley off a town's main street. He looked around quickly, his hand on the button of his transport acceptance unit, ready to retreat. But no one had seen him. He walked out of the alley onto the street.

The town was a shabby town—worse than most. There was little left of it but the main street and the stores fronting on it. If the Tradesmen's Protective Association groundwave radio network hadn't listed it as being able to supply scanner kits today, he would have turned back. It depressed the aging man. Even here on the main street, sand and rock were drifted in among the buildings.

There were a goodly number of individuals in town this day. The old man could see figures grouped in front of every store, and walking quickly back and forth across the street. He stopped and thought about it. There was something wrong.

It was the usual kind of crowd—a little larger than usual, perhaps, but not inordinately so. And they were dressed as people usually dressed to go to town, in masks and costumes. There were one or two individuals in broad-brimmed hats, plaid shirts, neckerchiefs, boots, and blue denim pants. There was one with spiked shoes, a white, baggy uniform of some kind, and a long-billed cap. There was lettering on the front of the shirt: "New York Giants." There was another in khaki clothes, boots, a web belt, a steel helmet, and a complicated facepiece with staring, glassy lenses over the eyes and a filter canister in the snout. Gas mask?

The old man frowned. Something was very wrong.

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They were purposeful. That was it, the old man thought; they were acting almost as if in concert. They were systematically going from store to store, like people together looking for something or someone in particular, instead of preserving a normal distant aloofness from each other. The old man looked about him warily, but he saw nothing that would create this kind of atmosphere.

Still, he was turning indecisively back toward the alley when a man suddenly emerged from between two buildings and stopped him. He was wearing a skull-tight leather helmet with dark-lensed goggles, a white silk scarf over his nose and jaw, a long leather coat, riding breeches, and knee-high boots. He seemed to be holding a splintered length of timber in his hand, and the old man wondered how on Earth *that* was meant to further his disguise.

"Just get here?" the man asked roughly.

"Why—why, yes. What's going on?" Was the man actually intending to use that timber for a club? In *this* day and age? What menace could possibly have arisen that the burners couldn't handle?

"Somebody around here's got a detector," the man in leather said in a tight voice. "And when we catch him, we'll hang him higher'n holy horned hell."

"A *scan* detector?"

"That's right, Mac. Somewhere around here, there's a louse that can sneak around at you and know it if you're going to watch him back."

"But—but how do you *know*?"

"The word's out, Mac. It's all over town." Suddenly the man stepped closer, and the old man half-raised an arm, expecting violence. But the man in leather was only terribly agitated – the scarf over his face was splotched with dampness from the nervous perspiration on his thick, ugly jaws. "Listen," the leather man whispered hoarsely, "listen, you wouldn't kid me about just getting here, would you? I ain't seen you anytime up to now. Maybe you just got here. Or maybe you been hidin'. Look—I ain't gonna bother you. You just slip me that detector and everything's okay."

"But I don't *have* a detector. I never heard of such a thing. I just arrived here."

The man in leather turned savage again. "Listen, Mac, you hand that thing over right now! One yell outta me, and everybody in town'll be down on you like a ton of bricks. We'll rip you to pieces! Now—you gonna gimme that thing nice and quiet so nobody notices? *Or do I yell*?"

"But I don't—"

"That's too bad for you, Mac," the man said, and raised his club.

There was a sudden outcry from the street. The leather man's abrupt motion had been noticed.

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"Hey!," a hysterical voice shouted out of the mob. "There's two guys talkin' to each other *alone*!"

For all his innocence, the old man understood that he and the leather man had been indicted and sentenced. Everybody on the street was frozen for an instant, every blank face turned toward him. The man in leather made a muffled, despairing sound behind his mask. Then, perhaps thinking he could still get the detector from the old man—still thinking the old man had it, because he was a stranger—he flexed his club-arm. Perhaps he somehow intended to beat it out of him. Whatever he thought he was going to do, he was so beside himself with opposed terror and avarice that he had no chance to do anything.

As the mob boiled up, the old man pulled out a tear gas bomb and threw it on the ground between himself and them. With his arm over his eyes, he jumped for his transport location and slapped the button of his acceptance unit. There was a hoarse, frustrated roar behind him, and then in the wink of an eye he was back home.

He sighed and straightened his robe. He was astonished to think that someone had at last solved the problem of detecting a scanner in use. But, mainly, he was heavy-hearted to think of such things and such people in the world, when no one had more than one life to live.

He was ready to call it quits for the day. But after only half an hour, he was too much on edge about the scanner parts. He sighed and tuned in the TPA radio again, to get the name of another town.

The next town was a cluster of neat, square concrete-block buildings in the cup of a green valley. Perhaps it was only that concrete was more enduring than the other town's wood framing, but the aging man instinctively liked it better. He stepped out of some underbrush a few score feet from the nearest store and walked toward it with his robes swaying lightly in the pleasant breeze. Softshod in their slippers, his feet made only bare whispers as he stepped onto the sidewalk.

There he stopped and peered through the mesh of his mask, trying to see into the store's interior. First he saw himself reflected in the window like a stranger, standing in his motley. Then his eyes focused beyond the glass. He made out rows of washing machines, and a slim figure in greasy coveralls just beginning to lay out trays of chronometers on top of the machines.

As he watched, the person inside the store looked up. The mask above the collar of the coveralls turned toward him, facing him from under a dirty cap with a

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broken bill. Abruptly, the figure turned from the trays and pirouetted to the door with the precision of a mechanical doll, completing the unified gesture with a welcoming curtsey. "Chronometers?"

He hesitated, a little startled. "No—no, thank you, Miss." Then he had time to think that the voice that came from behind her mask was not only clearly feminine, but clearly tense. He had the definite impression that she was clinging to this prepared sales technique not so much because she wanted to sell her chronometers but because she was terrified and trying to hide it.

"Are you sure?"

"Why—yes, Miss; I don't need a chronometer, thank you."

She let her hands droop. "Don't go away just yet."

"But . . . I *have* to. I have things to do."

"Please," she said quickly, "I just need someone to talk to for a few minutes." The plea struck an odd note for her, which was a peculiar thing to think of a stranger's voice. He mulled it over, and finally decided that she was generally self-assured, so that fear came strangely to her.

". . . All right," he said slowly. "Do you need help of some kind?"

"No!—Maybe I do. I don't know. I just came from another town, and I'm upset."

"The town with the mob?"

"Yes! Were you there? It was terrible. They were going to set fire to the store I was using. They threw stones through the windows! They said they were going to kill all the shopkeepers because one of them was supposed to have a scan detector. I almost didn't get to my transport."

He nodded.

"I was there. They tried to catch me, too."

"I didn't see you there," she said quickly. "It was awful. I never heard of anything like it! How am I ever going to know whether a town is safe or not? How do I even know *this* town is safe? All it took was for one person to begin shouting that someone had a detector, and everyone turned into an *animal*!"

"People become terrified," he fumbled to explain to her, though, in truth, it was hard for him to understand, too. "They stop thinking logically. A man with a detector—a man who *knows* if he's been discovered; who knows who's watching; who can fire his burner the instant his detector alarm goes off, because all men are his enemies, while his discoverer is still trying to make sure he's got the right man—that man is terribly frightening to think of. Who can be sure, now, that the next person he discovers won't be his last? Who can't help feeling even more utterly naked, now that someone's clothed? It's only nat-

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ural that people will lose their heads."

But, is it? he thought. Why can't we simply live? What dreadful secrets does our privacy conceal, that some of us must strive to invent detectors and others must kill the searchers? "But it's over, now, Miss," he tried to reassure her. "You're safe here."

"Why? What makes you think they won't spread out to other towns?"

"Mobs aren't that purposeful, Miss. And—well, isn't it likely it's all a silly rumor about the detector? It'll die down."

In a suddenly vicious voice, she said: "I'm glad you think so."

The old man felt foolish. "I'm sorry I've made you angry with me," he fumbled. The girl baffled him, but he hated to part in anger.

The girl waved her hand impatiently. "What do I care if you're sorry or not? Look—look, you've *got* to understand . . ." She faced him with such intensity that the man unconsciously took a step backward. "It's the end of the world!" the girl said. "Even this crumby world we've had up to now. If somebody's got a detector, that's *it*. From now on, nobody'll dare come to town without weapons. The second somebody gets the idea that the man with the detector's in town, everybody'll either have to join the mob or fight them off. How long do you think that can last? The TPA will dissolve—why should I risk my privacy belonging to an organization, if all the ads do is bring mobs down on me?

"Don't you *see*?" the girl said. "There won't be any more merchants after a while? There won't be towns? There won't even be any chances for men and women to meet each other? And how long is it going to be before we all begin burning everybody our scanner finds, the second it finds him?"

"Why?" the aging man said. "Why should it be this way? Is it really that much worse than it was before?" It hadn't seemed important to argue the point, before. But the girl was obviously so wrought up about it that he was being forced to give it serious attention at last.

"*Why*? Why?" The girl was beside herself. "It— Look, what's the difference between being a member of a nudist colony and having a peeping tom outside your bedroom window? What's the difference between a bullfight and a slaughterhouse?"

"I'm not sure . . ." the old man said vaguely. Why did people get this excited about things? Couldn't they just try to do the best they could with what life gave them?

"I'm *scared*," the girl said unnecessarily. "I'm so scared my bones ache. *Anybody* could be the man."

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"Or woman," the old man pointed out.

"Oh, no!" the girl said quickly. "It can't be."

"Why not?"

Because—because— *Oh, I don't know why!*" the girl cried out. "But it mustn't be! What chance do I have if it's a—?" She stopped and shook herself. "Sorry," she said in a calmer voice. "Ran away with myself for a minute, there, didn't I?" She put her hands behind her back and looked up at the old man with her weight on one leg. "I won't get anywhere in a flap, will I?"

"I—I don't know, Miss," the old man said. "I don't quite know what you mean." There was something disquieting about the girl's new mood.

"Oh, get *out* of here!" the girl cried. "Get out! I don't think you're him. I don't think you're him at all!"

"I . . ."

But the girl was already gone, flinging herself back into the interior of the shop, where she pressed against a wall with her hand on her eyes under her mask, her shoulders quivering.

"Well—goodbye . . ." the old man murmured, but there was no reply except the girl's hysterical sobbing. He hesitated for another moment. But he had to buy his scanner kits.

He moved slowly up the street, looking from side to side at the store fronts. And for all that the first town had frightened him, and the girl had puzzled and upset him, he gradually regained his normal disposition.

With a last shake of his head, he put the incident out of his mind. He stopped on the sidewalk, finally realizing that this aimless wandering was the least systematic way of finding what he wanted. The thing to do was to approach the problem logically. Where, in this town, would the electronician be?

As he stopped to mull it over, he found himself thinking that a man in his fifties really ought not to be such a bumbler.

He carried with him always a mental picture of a really well-organized man. He would be a man who thought out every step before he began anything, and then move concisely to his objective, whether it was developing a scan detector or buying a new machine kit. He would be a thoughtful, reserved, brooding man, never making a false step, aware of the value of not moving at all in preference to moving without complete preparation.

Whereas, he thought, looking up and down the street, I'm much too impulsive. It could be a very dangerous weakness.

Well . . . each to his own. Here he was, and still alive, too. And he rather enjoyed being himself,

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though he could still frown at his weaknesses. Enough of this. To work.

On the other side of the street were several stores in a row. One had colored glass globes and a mortar and pestle in the window, another had a red and white striped pole revolving in front of it, and beside it was a limestone building with a Grecian facade, small barred French neoclassic windows, heavy Gothic bronze doors, and a stopped electric clock let into the frieze above the lintel. Farther down were three stores, one with various kinds of bottles, one with bedsteads and bureaus, and one with cuts of meat. On his own side, he was standing in front of a store with the weather-beaten, nearly dissolved remains of weighted newspapers on a rack outside, and next to that was a store with a marquee on which movable letters spelled out: *Always Two Big Features.* Beyond that was a store with a driveway and three gasoline pumps. Next to that was a store with a giant replica of an obsolete key hanging over the doorway, its window full of toasters, lamps, and radios.

He considered the possibilities, looking thoughtfully at the store with the furniture, but then decided that an electronician's trade was likely to make him think in terms of security. Accordingly, he crossed the street toward the store with the small barred windows and the Grecian facade.

He'd been right. As he pushed through the doors, he found himself looking toward a row of small cages with marble wainscot fronts and little marble shelves under the wickets. In the far wall was a heavy, complicated-looking round metal door, open, with a small room behind it. On his right was an area bounded by a low marble partition, behind which there were mahogany desks and leather-covered chairs. There were packages of individual kits set on the partition's broad top, and larger assemblies displayed on the desks.

When he came farther in, a person appeared from behind the row of cages.

Heavy, ham-handed under his gloves, the electronician wore a slate blue uniform with a badged cap, carried a rectangular leather-and-canvas bag slung over his shoulder and walked sloppily in worn, broad black shoes.

"Yes?" he growled in a hoarse voice, setting the bag down.

"I want a kit set." The old man studied the electronician carefully.

"Kit *set*, hmm?" The electronician scratched the side of his stomach. He turned his masked face toward the desks, then looked back. "I don't handle anything but the best. You won't see better work from anybody."

"Yes?" He smelled clumsiness all over the electronician's approach.

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Nobody dared vary his work from the usual standard enough to stamp his product with the maker's personality. Anybody but a pure fool would be expected to know that.

Behind his own mask, he frowned at the electronician's. He wasn't that kind of a fool, and didn't feel pleased to be thought one.

"What I'm getting at," the electronician said, "kit sets come high. No real sense buying kits for every component in your rig when all you're going to do is replace one, right? Be more sensible to just buy the kit you need, instead of all those extras with it." He waved a casual hand at the individual kit packages set out on the low marble partition. "Look 'em over."

"*No sale!*" Robes fluttering, striding through the gap in the partition, the old man stopped beside the kit sets on the nearest desk and turned back toward the electronician. "I'll look at these. Save your tricks for your stupid customers." He felt quite angry.

The electronician chuckled. "O.K." He chuckled again and broke off, clearing his throat. "Never hurts to try."

"No? Have you ever discovered anyone that way?"

"Tracing 'em down by what components they need? Now, why should I tell you?"

"Son—" His anger had quickly changed to a kind of pity. With a slow shaking of his head, he said: "Son, I imagine it's quite comforting, being in the safest trade of all. Things will have to go quite far before people try to discover electronicians. But you're going out of your way for it, with your cheap tricks. One of these days you'll irritate someone who'll take it as a personal matter."

"I guess I can take care of myself," the electronician answered gruffly.

"Not very well, Son. Just starting in the trade, aren't you? How old are you—eighteen, twenty?"

"I am not!"

"Come on, now. A padded stomach never looks real—it moves as one mass, instead of a complex. Wearing all the socks in the world won't keep outsize shoes from slipping. You're clumsy with your hands—padding, again. Your gloves are too short—I can see a few blond hairs on your wrist. If you were older, they'd be darker. And if you don't stop trying to force your voice down, you'll ruin your vocal cords permanently. Voice training is not a matter of brute effort.

"Now—does it strike you I already know a great deal about you? I have an intermix file of over twenty thousand genetic characteristics. I think I could begin to vector in on you, don't you? It's an outside chance I'd discover you—but I might very well have observed more than I've

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already admitted. And in spite of your probable caution; in the light of your proven carelessness —mightn't I find some of your skin cells somewhere on one of these kits? An eyelash? Perhaps even some blood on a sharp edge? Do you wish to take the chance?" He hoped to make an impression on the boy. He was quite genuinely worried for him—some day, he might very well have the kind of customer who'd do something like that.

He expected the electronician to mumble something in a downcast voice. Instead, he saw that the man was standing there defiantly, for all his ridiculous padding.

"Sure. Any chance you care to name."

"I see." He was silent for a moment. Then he said, quietly: "You have a detector." It was a ridiculous stab in the dark, he knew.

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't."

"I . . . think perhaps you do. I must confess I—" He sighed. "I'm somewhat at a loss."

"You can be at anything you want to; are you going to buy one of my kits or aren't you?"

"Well. Well, now," the old man said, "I . . . I don't know."

"All right, then, go to another town."

"No—no, I don't want to do that. It's too much bother. Here—these sets over here—I'll take one of those." He felt a little bit trapped.

"Are you sure you want to take the chance, Grandpa?" There was acid in the young electronician's voice.

"I don't think I'm taking so much of a chance. I can always examine the kit very carefully before I use it."

"That's a lot of malarky, Grandpa. You wouldn't have time to check it all out before I discovered you."

The old man sighed again. "You're probably right. But I feel I'm almost forced to—you've defeated me, taken the wind out of my sails. It's . . . only fair that I run the risk, isn't it?"

The electronician laughed. "You're talking like a fool, Grandpa."

"Well, yes, perhaps, but an *old* fool." He looked at the young electronician, and realized the boy thought he was crazy.

I may be, he thought to himself. I don't know—I do what seems best—I live, I let live; so far I've done well. I don't see why I should act like a predator, simply because I'm in a predatory society. I'm a human being, I'm myself—if I make my life something vicious, who'll give me another if, too late, I regret what I've done?

"No, I'll take this kit," he said.

The electronician was shaking his head. "I can't figure you out,

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Pop. You're as innocent as a caterpillar."

"I'm afraid I don't understand you very well either, son." He took a deep breath. "Well, at any rate, I'll take this one. Twelve silver?"

"Fine by me. I'm low on solder."

"All right, then." He put the dozen featureless cubes of metal on the desk, and picked up the kit set. "Goodbye, son. And even so—be careful."

"So long, Grandpa. Don't let anybody steal the teeth out of your mouth."

"No one has up to now," he said, left the electronician's store.

But when he got outside, he hesitated. When he came to this town, the streets had been empty. Now they were uncomfortably full, and buzzing. He saw people walk purposefully into the stores at the other end of the main street, linger for a moment, and move on to the next. They were working their way in his direction, and somewhere inside one of the stores he heard a faint thump and the merest tinkle of breaking glass. He stepped back inside the electronician's store.

"Son!"

"Well, Grandpa?"

"I don't like the looks of things outside," he said. And I was so sure, he thought to himself in chagrin. So sure that no mob could stay together long enough. It must be bad—very bad, he thought with sad surprise, if they can be as systematic as this.

The youngster raised a hand to push him aside, and he barely remembered to wince away from the contact. But the electronician was not trying to steal a scrap of his robe. He was at the door, staring fixedly down the street, and then he was back, hastily cramming his kit sets into his leather bag.

"I've got to get going! They're between me and my transport already."

"You won't get by them. It's too late. They'll kill anyone who tries to break through them." And for what? he thought in puzzled anguish—for not being as defenseless as they? But when he's dead, they'll try to find his detector; to smash it, they'll say, but each man will be waiting his chance to steal it, and in the end they'll kill each other to have it.

"Come with me," the old man said, deciding suddenly. "Walk slowly."

"Come with *you*? All the way? To *your* transport?"

"I don't know what else you can do." He started for the door, and the electronician followed, cursing under his breath like a man reciting an incantation.

They moved outside into the street and crossed it, the gritty asphalt like sandpaper underfoot, angling toward the transport location in the underbrush beside the girl's shop.

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"How much further?" the electronician asked nervously. "There're a couple of characters looking at us pretty hard."

"Is one of them wearing a leather coat?" He wonder if the man had been killed or, with mob logic, taken over their leadership.

"I don't see him."

"Hold fast. Stop looking in their direction. Walk slowly. If things stay quiet, we'll make it."

At this moment, the girl burst out of her shop.

"Help me!" she cried out, and almost in echo, a voice down the street came to baying life. The electronician grunted in dismay.

The girl threw herself in their path. "Please—they'll kill me!"

The electronician pushed her savagely out of the way. "Stand clear or we'll do it for them. Come *on*, Pop!"

The old man had stopped. He threw a quick glance down the street. The mob suddenly catalyzed, was boiling toward them. He looked back toward the girl. The electronician, frustrated and helpless without anyone to show him the transport location, was almost shaking with impatience. The girl sobbed:

"I'm so frightened! I don't know what to do!"

"Come with me," the old man said at last. The three of them broke for the underbush. A stone crashed into the scrub oak around them. Someone shouted: "There he goes, with those other two!" Then they were on the old man's portal. He threw a thermite bomb into the underbrush. He clasped the girl and the electronician to him with one long, hard-muscled arm and thumbed his acceptance unit.

There was a flick of light, and the three of them stood in a small dark chamber that was the transport location in his house.

"Look!" he shouted, to make sure the girl and the electronician would have their eyes open, and set off a magnesian flare.

The resulting blaze of light would have temporarily blinded him, too, if he hadn't shielded his face. He disarmed the chamber while the other two groped.

Then he led them out into his parlor.

He sighed. "Well. Well, now," he murmured in a relieved voice, "welcome to my home. I'll make coffee."

He set the tray on the coffee table in front of them and handed each of them a napkin and a plate with a fork and a piece of chocolate cake on it. He put down the coffee cups, and the cream and sugar between them. Drawing up a chair for himself, he sat back, facing them, with his hood thrown back and his mask off.

He raised his cup to his lips, sipped it, and relaxed.

"It's good, I think. I'm not ac-

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customed to brewing for so many —I was afraid it would be too weak." He smiled at them apologetically. "Forgive me for being the anxious host."

The electronician let his breath come out explosively behind his mask. "All right!" he said with a brittle laugh, "If we're going to have a quiet little social, then a quiet little social is what we're going to have." He put his cake down, flipped off his cap, and pulled his mask away. He was a square-faced young man with short hair, a snub nose, and clear blue eyes, and he stared at the old man with something like defiance, as though he realized how ludicrous he looked with his young face poking up out of the padded nest of his clothes. After a moment he seized his cake, carved off a large piece with the edge of his fork, and crammed it into his mouth.

The girl sat motionless, her two hands holding her cake plate out over her lap. Her head turned from one man to the other.

Then she put her plate down with a dramatic clatter. She stood up, stripped off cap, mask, and coveralls, and sat down calmly in her under-clothing.

She seemed to regain all her composure by so doing, and, taking her cake between thumb and forefinger, nibbled daintily at the edge. "Mmmmit's good," she said with a nod toward the old man. She was a petite brunette, almost elfin, with very small lips.

He looked at her with astonishment; a look which spread to include the electronician when he saw that the young man was blushing.

Actually, the girl's clothing was still more than adequate—he could remember a time when it would have been laughably prudish—and, as a matter of fact, her grimy coveralls had made him nervous for the couch's upholstery. But it was, undeniably, lingerie she was wearing, and the electronician was pointedly keeping his glance in his coffee cup.

"Do you really like the cake?" the old man said to the girl. "I'm proud of my baking, but, then, I'm used to it."

"It's *very* good," she answered.

"Look," the electronician broke in, "we're going to all be here together for a while, aren't we?"

"It ought to be all right to go back to your transports by tomorrow," the old man said. He turned to the girl. "I'm afraid you'll find all your chronometers gone, Miss."

"I'm safe. That's what counts."

"I want a lock of your hair," the electronician said harshly. "Yours, too," he said to the girl. "I'll be damned if I'm going to just go home after this is all over and trust you two not to have a little surprise waiting for me."

The old man sighed. The elec-

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tronician did not need to be so blunt. "All right."

"Maybe you're willing to trust people beyond all reason," the electronician said almost defiantly. "I'm not."

"All right," the old man repeated patiently. "I'll find some scissors." The electronician took a determined gulp of his coffee, not looking at either of them, his jaw set stubbornly.

The old man stood up, and the girl said: "I'll go with you."

"You don't have to," the electronician said to her in a high, clear voice. "I'm not going to make a pass at you."

"You couldn't make the grade," the girl said without emphasis, and linked her arm through the old man's. He looked at her in mild astonishment. "Let's go find those scissors," she said to him, and they left the electronician sitting in the living room, chewing at his cake.

In the kitchen he rummaged through the cutlery drawer.

She touched his arm gently.

"Panda?" she said in a soft voice.

"Eh?" He was completely nonplussed.

"Do you mind if I call you Panda?"

"Why— Well . . . no, no, of course not." He chuckled at himself. "I didn't understand you for a moment. But it's all right. Af course we have to have names for each other."

"What name are you going to give me?"

He thought for a moment. "Why, I don't know. . . . Would Dancer do?"

She smiled at him, her nose wrinkling cutely. "That's *lovely*! Thank you, Panda."

"You're welcome, Dancer," he answered gravely.

"Panda—" She was intent on something now. "What're we going to do with him?"

"With the electronician? What should we do with him?"

She moved her fingernails lazily along his forearm. "Well, we don't really want him here, do we?"

"I hadn't thought about it," he said with some bewilderment. In a way, it was good to have people in the house again, even if the electronician was so grumpy.

"But he's an electronician," she said flatly.

"Yes, he is. What difference does that make?"

"Doesn't it strike you that this business with the locks of hair is just a blind? He might be trying to make us think he's completely preoccupied with his own safety. Or he might simply want to encourage us to believe that once we're all in each other's power, the two of us can relax. But it's not that way at all. We're all too used to thinking that danger comes from someone unseen and

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far away. But if he tried to kill us—now, here with his hands—could you stop him? Or if he wanted to get at your scanner rig?"

He looked at her with considerable respect. People who could think in these complicated patterns had a always impressed him.

"You're a very thoughtful young lady, Dancer. But why my scanner rig? It's no different from anyone else's."

"Well—oh, all right, Panda. If you want to play it that way, we'll let it go. But we *do* have to do something about him. I'm sorry; you may not need to worry, but I do."

Her lips fell into a pout. And, though it might have been his imagination, he seemed to feel just the barest touch of her knee against his leg. He thought about it, and finally decided it couldn't have been his imagination—or an accident. He looked down at her with some surprise.

"Just what do you think we should do?" he asked her.

"Well," she said, her fingernails once more toying with his arm, "it looks to me like it's either him or us."

"Dancer!" How could anyone live with so much fear? How could anyone be so afraid, that murder came so easily into their minds?

Now she flared up at him. "Maybe you're in a position to fumble along like this. I'm not. I've got eyes watching and pawing over me every minute of every day! Even if they aren't there, I can still feel them. My skin's been crawling all my life. Now, for the first time, I've got a chance to pull down some shades, and I'm not going to let that blond young calf out there do me out of it. I won't feel safe until I know for sure he's not going to be able to bother me. And if you think I'd ever feel safe after I've given him a sure discovery like a lock of hair, you're wrong!"

"But . . . he'll be as much in your power as you are in his, if we all exchange locks."

"Suppose I lose it? What then?"

"But—there's just as much chance he'd lose yours."

"I don't care. I couldn't sleep nights!" Her temper broke as suddenly as it had appeared. She leaned against his chest, the side of her head resting at the base of his neck and her hands on his upper arms. "Even if I were here with you," she murmured.

He stared out over her head, thinking of what a slow-witted fool he was not to have seen this coming.

"Dancer?"

"Yes, Panda?"

"Did you *deliberately* try to come home with me?"

She nodded her head with the abashed motion of a little girl.

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Why? he thought. Why me?

And then he knew. He shook his head, reluctant to accept it. "What made you think I had a detector?"

"You came from the other town, didn't you? And the mob was chasing you."

He took a deep breath. "I see." He wondered, as he often had during his life, at people's ability to think so intricately and to still be wrong.

"Dancer, I don't have a detector." For a small moment he found himself wishing he had. "But the electronician does."

He felt her draw away from him, and thought: Well, that's over, now, and you'll never have it back. Then he said to himself, for the second time that day: Come on, now, old man.

He looked at the girl. She was biting her lower lip so fiercely that he was afraid she would draw blood.

He pushed the cutlery drawer shut.

"I found the scissors," he said lamely.

The electronician glared at them suspiciously when they came back into the room. The girl, bristling, stalked to the far end of the couch and sat down with her hands balled in her lap. The old man took his chair and watched them both.

He was far out of his depth. All these years of living by himself, with no one to show him how the world was changing, had made him a misfit. He could understand neither the girl nor the electronician, but they were obviously better suited to their life than he was.

It was an unsettling thing to realize.

"All right," the electronician said at last. He picked up the scissors. "It was my idea, so I'll go first." He hacked two tufts of hair from his scalp and dropped them on the coffee table. He looked challengingly at the girl and the old man. "Who's next?"

It was the girl. She reached for the scissors a fraction of a second before the old man could, and when she did she reached left-handed, so that her arm brushed the electronician's shoulder. The glare in the youngster's eyes wavered for an instant.

"All right," the electronician said again when they were all finished, "if I'm going to stay here overnight, I want a room of my own." He looked meaningfully at the old man. "With a standard power supply, and a good lock on the door."

"There's an extra room available," the old man answered gently. "With a standard power supply. I imagine I can find you a deadfall bolt somewhere, as well. It's not really necessary for

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you to make your requests so forcefully."

"Isn't it?" the electronician said with a crooked grin. "I don't see any reason why a wool-headed grandfather wouldn't kill me for a detector. Or a little bitch of a girl, either. Or wasn't that what you were talking about in the kitchen?"

The old man cleared his throat. "Not quite. We might have, but we had our facts wrong."

The girl made a bitter sound in her throat.

The electronician shrugged. "Anyway, I want that room now. The sooner I have a rig patched together, the better I'll feel."

"You're a very hard young man," the old man said.

"What about it?"

"I've been thinking—*how* did that mob learn you had a detector? Surely you didn't tell someone?"

"Maybe I did and maybe I didn't," the electronican growled in a shaky voice.

"You didn't try to sell one, did you?"

The youngster looked at him sharply.

"One of these days, I may figure you out, Grandpa. Yes," he said, "I got the bright idea that if I picked my customers carefully, I could sell some. I was wrong."

He stood up violently. "This world's never going to last another five years. It's got to smash. How long can we go on looting the cities? Do you seriously think we'll ever be able to produce anything new? How long can we go on even so much as shopping? This is more than anybody can stand. We're living off each other's good will, and only sane people have good will. There are days when I wake up and think: 'If I don't feel one trace of hope by noon today, I'm going to cut my throat.' And I never do. I never feel the hope, but I never cut my throat, because I'm afraid to. I'm so afraid, every minute of every day, that I don't have any tolerance for any more fear.

"I thought I had it solved when I worked out the detector. All it did was make me more alone. Well, I've had it now. If this world's going to smash, I'm going to help it. Nobody's going to get that detector out of me. Not even if they suddenly wake up and realize that if everybody has one, we're all safe. It's too late for that. They won't let themselves stop and think. The first guy I picked wanted one so bad he was shaking all over. But he didn't trust me not to turn him in to his friends. Me—the man who made it in the first place—he didn't trust *me!* What'm I supposed to do with people like that? Get myself killed? No, sir—from now on I look out for myself."

He scooped up his leather bag

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with the scanner kits, took the swatches of the girl's and the old man's hair, and set his jaw. "Now, which way's that room?" He was shaking.

The old man stood up slowly, his eyes full of pity. "Come with me," he sighed. He looked over at the girl, who was staring fixedly at the electronician's pack.

He shook his head. It must really be a very bad world, after all.

When he came back from taking the electronician to the spare bedroom, the girl was still sitting on the couch.

"Dancer?"

She raised her head. "Yes?"

"You can have my room tonight. And you'll want a rig of your own, of course. I have a complete new kit, and my old one. Between the two of them, you'll be able to set up something that'll be good enough for tonight, anyway. I'll help you with it, if you'll trust me." He did not mention that this would probably leave him without a working rig of his own. He did not think it important.

She smiled wanly. "I trust you, Panda." She got up from the couch and came over to him, and, once again, she had changed. Now she was simply being friendly, and, despite himself, the old man regretted the change. "But I can't trust that blond louse as long as he's got a detector," she said intently. "I don't really mind knowing he can scan me any time he wants to—but I can't stand the thought of his being able to know if I tried to scan him! It's—damn it, Panda, it's not fair!"

He nodded.

"And it's dangerous. He could kill me."

Well, yes, the old man thought. Anyone can kill you. The men who have to kill women, the men who have to kill men, the women who have to kill men — the women who have to kill women, too, I suppose — anyone can kill you. But it's not *that* bad. "Can" is not "will."

And, besides, she doesn't sound as though she really believes it of the electronician.

"I don't mind," the girl said nervously. "I really don't mind, if it's taking my chances against theirs. But when you can't touch them, and they can touch you—"

She broke off and clasped his hand apologetically. "Panda," she whispered, "I'm sorry. I'm going to have to go after him. You—you won't mind too much, will you? If I start paying attention to him?"

He shook his head, smiling down at her.

"You're a wonderful man, Panda. Do you really live here all alone? Didn't you ever have a wife, or children? You *must* have."

He shook his head. "I don't think so," he smiled. "I don't

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mind. I take what life gives me." He wished he could convince other people to grasp that approach to life. Couldn't they see how needlessly they complicated their lives?

"You don't *think* so?"

He shrugged, a little amused at her vehemence. "Dancer, one day is so much like another. Who can remember them all?" He clasped his hand over hers. "I'll go see about the scanner parts, now."

He stood up and walked away toward his room. He took the new kit set out of his robes, and he was beginning to open the first cardboard box of components as he stepped through the door of the room.

He stopped and looked at the rig filling one wall. It had been a fantastically elaborate installation, once—much more elaborate than he remembered. But now everything—the tuning stage, the sample analyzer, the viewscreen and the burner interlock controls—everything was a fused and blackened mass.

He looked at it open-mouthed, trying to get it clear in his mind.

What had happened? What *could* have happened?

He went slowly over to the rig and ran his fingers over the buckled sheet steel of the cabinets. It was cold. Charred paint left black marks on his fingertips.

A hit, he thought. A direct burner hit on the rig, but a miss on me.

He could not understand it. He tried, but he could not. He looked at the logging clock, set into a cabinet and now stopped, a yellow smudge of scorch on the surface of its dial. The calendar hands told him it had happened yesterday; the clock hands told him last night. And that was a mystery, too, because he could not for the life of him remember any such thing.

Would a near miss electroshock a man into partial amnesia? Maybe. But how could a burner miss? If the burner would fire at all, it had to have a vector, a personality vector, to be fired at a man.

Somehow, his rig had a defense. Or he had a defense, which was the same thing.

Was it?

The old man was growing more and more confused. His fingers were running over the ruined equipment with a life and upsetting familiarity of their own. He began to tear at the cabinet faces, heedless of the screech of ripping light-gauge steel and the snap of sheet-metal screws. He was astonished at the iron strength in his wood-carver's hands, but only faintly so. It was as if he were watching himself from a certain distance. It was not only his arms, now, that had their own volition.

He found the hidden component. It was almost fused, but the

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circuits were perfectly readable to him, in spite of the fact that they were far from standard and no one who had not invented them ought to be able to understand them.

He looked at the thing, and well in the back of his mind he was frightened, though only in the back of his mind. He had suddenly been sure he would find it, but he wondered how he might have built a detector, used it . . . and not known it.

He walked away from the rig. It was plain, now, what had happened. Someone, somewhere, had managed at some time to establish a personality vector on him. How long ago, he could not guess, nor was there any point in caring. On one of his shopping expeditions, probably, someone had snipped a bit of his costume. Last night, that unknown watcher's control had snapped, and the burner beam had gone flashing down the scan carrier—only to register in the detector. And his own burner, firing back on a built-in automatic impulse along that same stranger's carrier, had shorted out everything, including the rig where the other man, somewhere in the world, now lay a charred corpse against burnt metal, never to know how deadly a target he had chosen. But why had the stranger's shot failed to kill?

The old man took a deep breath, and then another. The moment of panic was over, fading under the calm of logical thought. He looked toward the mirror over the bureau.

He saw himself sitting on the edge of his bed, his heavy shoulders slumped and his dirtied hands dangling over his thighs. But in the face—fading with the panic, already blurring under his own features—he found at last the face of Rumpelstiltskin.

After a time, he walked out into the living room. "Dancer," he whispered. "Dancer, I—I seem to have been making a fundamental error about myself."

And still it was hard for him to accept such a thing. But he had seen the face in the mirror: the muscles contracted into hard knots by the rictus of permanent fear; the lips curled back in the snarl of hate; the lower jaw out-thrust to bare his canine teeth; and in the eyes, the blazing, genuinely identifying fear that someday something might happen and he could not be evil anymore.

It's a different man, he thought. A terribly intense, different man, and I never knew he was there. It's fantastic how the same skin can stretch over the same skull and still form so different an expression.

"Wait a minute, now," the electronician was saying. "You're trying to tell us you and this man share the same body?"

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The electronician was sitting in the chair, and the old man was sitting on the couch, with the girl holding his hand between her two and looking at him in concern.

"Not just the same body." The old man shook his head. "The same mind. That's the important part."

"You know, I wouldn't believe this for a minute," the electronician said, "if you hadn't showed us the rig and the detector." He added thoughtfully; "It's a better one than mine." He looked at the old man and grinned. "Foxy Grandpa."

"No! No, I'm not anything like that!" the old man said quickly. "That is . . . I've always *thought* I was an honest man." He sighed. He felt very tired.

How could such a thing happen? Could a man become so frightened that he ran away and hid from part of himself?

It could be, he realized. A man might refuse to live in the world. He could lurk in the back of his brain, cowering, coming out only when he knew that for some brief moment, he was free to lash safely back at the world that terrified him. And then he would hide again, and let some other part of his self bear the burden of life.

That other part might be all unknowing — could think it was a whole man. Certainly, the frightened man in his fortress of darkness would never betray his presence to the one potential enemy who shared his habitation with him.

I thought I was I, the old man thought to himself. I never knew. I thought this was my life, my self, my destiny. "But I'm only a mask," he murmured.

"This is a funny thing," the electronician said.

"It's not funny at all!" the girl flared.

"Oh, hush up, Hon," the electronician said. "It's funny. It's a joke on all of us."

The old man felt bewildered, for one more time on this bewildering day. "How? I don't follow you."

"Well, look—look at the situation," the young man said, growing a little more excited as his notion took hold of him. "Look at you—a kindly, earnest, sort of silly old man. Who'd bother with you? What stretch of the imagination would it take to be afraid of you, or hate you? And all the time you were a hiding place for a monster. So good a hiding place that even if the monster hid inside you at the last moment, he was still safe. The burner missed you. It didn't have a fix on *your* personality, Panda." The electronician laughed, and now his excitement was clearly only a hair's breath away from hysteria. "Now we know we can't trust *anybody*."

The girl gripped the old man's

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hand. "Oh, no, Panda! Don't listen to him!"

The old man's head was wagging again. "He's right, I think," he murmured. "I think he may be . . . but—" His face lit up in sudden thought. "Weren't you trying to sell detectors, so people would be protected from each other? And don't we both, now, have detectors? Doesn't Dancer have one, too, because either you or I will give her one? Doesn't that make three of us who can trust each other?"

"Holy smoke," the electronician said softly. "I never thought of that."

"We've been afraid. But now there are three of us. Three friends. Can't three people, working together, make friends with a fourth? And can't four people make friends with a few more? And can't this thing grow, and grow, until it re-takes the world?" The old man smiled. "And some day, it might very well be possible to have a quarrel with someone without having to kill him. That will be the day, I think, when we'll know the world is friendly."

The girl leaned forward and kissed his cheek, with such force that he almost lost his balance. He smiled up at the electronician, who winked back and then pulled the girl back with two fingers pinching her earlobe. "Hey, now, none of that!"

"And what right have *you* got to—!" It became a lovers' quarrel.

The old man sat listening to it without attempting to remember the specific words they were using. He felt warm and content.

He was thinking about the other man, cowering inside him. The old man could not understand such a person. There was no real understanding between them. And as the need for killing passed, as the world began to change away from anything that trapped man could understand at all—could that man come out at all?

The old man doubted it. It seemed to him that as he worked to make the world more and more a place in which he could be happy, the other man could only sink deeper and deeper into the darkness. And when the world came out into the sunlight again, the other man would have become so small that he would be invisible, and finally be gone.

The old man felt a pang at that, for the old man had never killed anyone before.

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SCIENCE

Newsmen speak glibly of the speed a missile must achieve to get "beyond the reach of gravity," and you, possibly, refer to Newton's discovery of gravity when he was hit on the head by a falling apple. All wrong, says Dr. Asimov (as perhaps you knew)—and proceeds to discuss, in his own particularly lucid way, a subject whose importance to all of us is today of increasing interest and concern.

CATCHING UP WITH NEWTON

by Isaac Asimov

IT IS IRRITATING THAT, IN THIS modern era of missiles and satellites, there are so many newsmen who haven't yet caught up with Newton. They speak with glibness about the weightlessness experienced by a spaceman once he has climbed "beyond the reach of gravity," thus implying that there is a boundary line near the top of the atmosphere or thereabouts, beyond which there is suddenly no gravity. Which is the very thing Newton's theory disallows.

Isaac Newton was the first to formulate the Law of Universal Gravitation. Note the adjective "Universal," which is the key word. Newton did *not* discover that apples fell to the ground when they broke loose from the tree—what he did demonstrate was that the Moon's path around the Earth could be explained by supposing that the Moon was in the grip of the same force that tugged at the apple.

His great suggestion was that every piece of matter in the Universe attracted every other piece of matter, and that the quantity of this force could be expressed in a simple formula.

The force of attraction (f) be-

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tween any two bodies, said Newton, is proportional to the product of the masses (m_1 and m_2) of the bodies, and inversely proportional to the square of the distance (d) between their centers. By introducing a proportionality constant (G), we can set up an equation representing the above statement symbolically:

$$f = Gm_1m_2/d^2 \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

The most recent and, presumably, most accurate value obtained for G (in 1928, at the Bureau of Standards) is 6.670×10^{-8} dyne cm^2/sec^2. This means that if two 1-gram spherical masses are placed exactly 1 centimeter apart (center to center), the attraction between them is 6.670×10^{-8} dynes.

This shows gravity to be a relatively weak force as compared with electrical and magnetic attractions, for instance. One dyne of force is equivalent, roughly, to 1 milligram of weight. If the two 1-gram spheres were the only matter in the universe, therefore, each would weigh, under the gravitational attraction of the other at the distance indicated, only 0.000000066 milligrams (or about two trillionths of an ounce.) However, when masses as large as the Earth are concerned, even a weak force like gravity becomes tremendous.

Of course, we don't have to use dynes or any other fancy units to understand the essentials of gravity. Suppose, for instance, that the two masses between which we are trying to measure gravitational attraction are a spaceship and the planet Earth. The mass of the spaceship we can set equal to 1 (one what? One spaceship-mass). The mass of the Earth we can also set equal to 1, by using different units — one Earth-mass, this time.

The distance between the center of the Earth and the center of the spaceship, which we will suppose to be resting on the Earth's surface is just about 3,950 miles. We can make this value also 1 by calling that number of miles 1 Earth-radius.

Notice that in using Newton's equation, it is necessary to take distances from center to center. In other words, the important point is not how far the Spaceship is from the surface of the Earth, but how far from its center.

It is one of Newton's great accomplishments, you see, that he was able to demonstrate that spheres of uniform density attract each other as though all their mass were concentrated at the central point. To be sure, actual heavenly bodies are not uniformly dense, but Newton also showed this central-point business to be true for spheres which consist of a series of layers (like an onion) each of which is uniform in dens-

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ity, though the density may vary from layer to layer. This modified situation *does* hold true for actual heavenly bodies.

But back to Earth and spaceship— Now that we have chosen convenient units for masses and distances, it is only necessary to make the gravitational constant also 1 (one constant-value) and Equation I becomes:

$$f=1 \times 1 \times 1/1^2 \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

Therefore, as the result of our shrewd unit choices, it turns out that the force of attraction between Earth and spaceship is also 1 (one gravity-value, that is, or, to abbreviate, 1 g.)

So far so good, but this is for the spaceship resting on Earth's surface. What if it were not on Earth's surface but 3,950 miles straight up above the surface.

By changing the spaceship's position, we are not altering its mass, or Earth's mass, or the gravitational constant. Each of these can remain 1. The only thing that is being altered is the distance between the center of the spaceship and the center of the Earth, so distance is all we need concern ourselves with and Equation 2 becomes:

$$f=1/d^2 \quad \text{(Equation 3)}$$

Now, then, if the spaceship is 3,950 miles above the Earth's surface, its distance from the center of the Earth is 3,950 miles plus 3,950 miles or 2 Earth-radii. (We can use any units we want but, once having chosen them, we must stick with them. Such are the ethics of the situation.)

Using Equation 3, at 3,950 miles above the Earth's surface, the force (f) of attraction between Earth and the spaceship is $\frac{1}{2^2}$ or 0.25 g. (Remember that "g" stands for "gravity-values" according to our system; it is the same "g," incidentally, as that referred to in discussions of force experienced by diving pilots.)

Gravitational attraction is usually measured by weighing an object. Consequently we can say that whatever the weight of the spaceship on the surface of the Earth, it weighs (i.e. is attracted by the Earth) only ¼ as much when it is 3,950 miles above the surface.

By the same reasoning we could show that this would hold for any object other than the spaceship. The gravitational attraction of Earth for anything at all drops to a quarter of its value as that "anything at all" is moved from Earth's surface to a height 3,950 miles above its surface.

Equation 3 will also give us the force between the Earth and the spaceship (or any other object) for any height above the surface. Some figures, so obtained, are shown in Table I.

As you see, gravitational force starts dropping off at once. Even at Sputnik heights, so to speak,

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Table I:

Earth's gravitational force in relation to distance

Distance to surface of Earth in miles	Distance to center of Earth in miles	Distance to center of Earth in Earth-radii	Gravitational attraction in "g"
0 (sea-level)	3,950	1.000	1.000
50 (top of the stratosphere)	4,000	1.012	0.975
150 (Sputnik-perigee)	4,100	1.040	0.924
250	4,200	1.063	0.884
1,000 (Sputnik-apogee)	4,950	1.253	0.636
2,000	5,950	1.506	0.442
4,000	7,950	2.015	0.247
10,000	13,950	3.53	0.081
20,000	23,950	6.06	0.027
50,000	53,950	13.62	0.0054
100,000	103,950	26.3	0.0014
250,000 (Moon-apogee)	253,950	64.2	0.00024
25,000,000 (closest approach of Venus)	25,003,950	6300	0.000000025

it varies from ⅞ to 9/10 of what it is at the planet's surface. Or, to get petty about it: if you weigh 150 lbs. and are suddenly transported to the top of Mount Everest from your sea-level home, you would find gravity weakened enough to reduce your weight to 149½ pounds.

Nevertheless, Earth's gravitational force does not drop to zero, no matter what the distance. No matter how large you make "d" in Equation 3, "f" is never zero. If you go back to Equation 1, you will see that this is also true for the attraction between any two bodies, however small, with masses greater than zero. In other words, the gravitational influence of every body, however small, is exerted through all of space.

Nor does the force quickly become negligible when large bodies are involved. The gravitational force between Earth and Venus, at closest approach is only 0.000000025 that of what it would be if the two planets were in contact. Nevertheless, the force attracting them to each other, even at a distance of 25,000,000 miles is still equal to 130 trillion tons.

The word "Universal" in Newton's law wouldn't be worth much, if the equation did not apply to other planetary bodies. Let us suppose, then, that our spaceship is resting on the surface of the Moon.

To begin with, the spaceship has the same mass (i.e. the quantity of matter contained in its substance) as on Earth. We have agreed to let that mass (m_1) equal 1. The constant "G" never varies and we agreed to let that equal 1, also. Equation 4 therefore becomes:

$$f = m_2/d^2 \quad \text{(Equation 4)}$$

where "m_2" is the mass of the Moon and "d" is the distance from the center of the spaceship to the center of the Moon. Since the spaceship is on the Moon's surface, "d" is equal to the radius of the Moon.

We've defined our unit for "m_2" as "Earth-masses" and for "d" as "Earth-radii", and we will stick to that. The Moon is only 0.0123 (about 1/81) as massive as the Earth and its radius is only 0.273 (a little over ¼) that of the Earth.

The Moon's mass is therefore 0.0123 "Earth-masses" and its radius 0.273 "Earth-radii" so that Equation 4 becomes

$$f = 0.0123/0.273^2 = 0.164$$
$$\text{(Equation 5)}$$

This means that whatever the spaceship weighs on the surface of the Earth as the result of the force of Earth's gravitational attraction, it weighs 0.164 times that (roughly ⅙) on the surface of the Moon, as the result of the Moon's (lesser) gravitational attraction. By the same reasoning, this ratio

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of weight would hold true for any object at all.

Given the mass and radius of any body, the value of the surface gravity of that body can be calculated in the same way. The surface gravity of various bodies in the Solar System is presented in Table II by way of example.

Notice that Jupiter and Saturn are not perfect spheres. Both are noticeably flattened at the poles. Saturn is the least spherical of the planets, there being a 12 percent difference between the polar radius and the equatorial radius. For Jupiter, there is a 7.5 percent difference. In both cases, since "d" varies with latitude, so does surface gravity, being least at the equator and highest at the pole. (The equatorial gravity is further decreased by the centrifugal force of the planet's spin, but I've ignored that here. Enough is enough.)

The fact that Saturn, which is so much more massive than Earth, has a surface gravity only slightly higher is not mysterious. Saturn is only ⅛ as dense as Earth and is correspondingly more voluminus than it would be if it were made of Earth-type material. The effect of the abnormally large radius for Saturn's mass (as compared with Earth) is to lower the surface gravity because of increased distance between Saturn's center and an object on its surface by just about as much as Saturn's greater mass raises it.

Surface gravities of Saturn and Earth may be aproximately equal but this is illusory, in a way. Look at it this way—

A spaceship on a planetary surface is at varying distance from that planet's center, since planets come in different sizes. Suppose, though, that a spaceship is 230,000 miles from Earth's center at one time and 230,000 miles from Saturn's center at another.

When it is 230,000 miles from Earth's center it is about 226,000 miles above its surface. At 230,000 miles from Saturn's center, it is only 192,000 miles above its surface, Saturn being the larger body. However, it is distance from the center that counts.

In such a case, with "d" equal in the two situations, only "m_2" (see Equation 4) remains to vary the result. Earth's mass is, of course, equal to 1 "Earth-mass". Saturn's mass is 95.2 "Earth-masses." Therefore, the gravitational force gripping the spaceship in the neighborhood of Saturn is always 95.2 times that gripping it at an equal distance from Earth.

This can be shown in the behavior of two satellites that happen to be at this distance from Earth and Saturn. The Moon is at an average distance of 239,000 miles from Earth's center, while Saturn's satellite, Dione, is about

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Table II:

Some Surface Gravities in the Solar System

Astronomical Body	Mass (in Earth-masses)	Radius (in Earth-radii)	Surface gravity
Jupiter (pole)	318	10.5	2.88
Jupiter (equator)	318	11.2	2.54
Neptune	17.3	3.4	1.50
Saturn (pole)	95.2	8.5	1.32
Saturn (equator)	95.2	9.5	1.05
Uranus	14.5	3.7	1.05
Earth	1.0	1.0	1.00
Venus	0.82	0.96	0.89
Mars	0.11	0.525	0.40
Mercury	0.054	0.380	0.27
Ganymede	0.026	0.395	0.17
Moon	0.0123	0.273	0.16

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230,000 miles from Saturn's center. Each travels just about 1,500,000 miles in completing its circuit about its primary.

The greater the force of gravitational attraction upon a satellite, the faster must that satellite move to work up enough centrifugal force to keep in its orbit against its planet's pull. The Moon can manage this by travelling at a rate of 2200 miles an hour and completing its revolution in a leisurely 27.32 days. Dione, however, must race along at just ten times that speed to stay in orbit. Its period of revolution is only 2.74 days.

That, and not the surface gravity figures, is a measure of the force a spaceship would be fighting if it were maneuvering in the neighborhood of Saturn.

Nevertheless, however great the gravitational force exerted by a planet, and however close to it a spaceship may be, it remains possible for the spaceship (and the people on it) to be weightless. And this does *not* mean that the force of gravity has been suspended.

Gravity is a force and a force is defined as something that can accelerate a mass. That, so to speak, is gravity's main job. It is what it is doing constantly all over the Universe.

We ourselves happen to be most used to gravitational force in its manifestation as the sensation of weight. Actually, this type of manifestation occurs only in a special case; where a body is prevented from responding, by accelerated motion, to gravitational force. (Accelerated motion, by the way, is motion that is continually changing either in velocity or in direction or both.)

The most common way in which accelerated motion can be prevented is by having the two bodies between which the gravitational force exists (i.e. a spaceship and Earth) in contact so that neither can move with respect to the other under the pull of gravitational force alone. You and I are almost always in contact with Earth and it is for that reason that we learn to think of gravity as primarily concerned with weight.

Yet we live with the acceleration, too. Hold a book at arm level and let go. At once gravitational force expresses itself in terms of acceleration. The book accelerates in the direction of Earth's center and keeps on until the surface of the planet intercepts it and it can move no more.

The Moon, as it moves about the Earth, is undergoing accelerated motion since, moving in an ellipse as it does, it is continually changing direction, turning a full 360° in 27.32 days. (It also continually changes velocity, to a comparatively minor extent.) Dione, under the whip of a

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stronger gravitational force, is more strongly accelerated, changing direction more quickly and turning 360°, as I have said, in only 2.74 days.

Whenever, a body like a book or a satellite is responding to gravitational force by unrestricted accelerated motion, it is said to be in "free fall." The word "unrestricted" in the previous sentence is a bow in the direction of air resistance. A book falling from your hand ought to be moving through a vacuum to be in true free fall.

An object moving in response to gravitational force, with another constant (i.e. non-accelerated) motion superimposed, is still in free fall. A missile, with its charge expended, moving in a direction more or less opposed to that induced by gravity; or a satellite (artificial variety), with its rocket stages gone, and with a component motion perpendicular to that imposed by gravity—both are still in free fall.

An object which is completely in free fall is responding to gravity all it can; it has no response left over, so to speak, to be manifested as weight. An object in free fall is therefore weightless. An airplane angled up through the stratosphere is in free fall once the motor is turned off and the pilot is then (and, in actual experiments, has been) weightless for as long as 35 seconds, until the plane angled down once more and the engines were turned on again. For that matter, if the cable of an office-building's elevator broke and the elevator fell freely with unfortunate you inside, you would be as weightless for a few seconds (barring minor air-resistance effects) as any man in inter-Galactic space.

If you were falling at an acceleration *greater* than that imposed by gravity (as in an airplane power dive) you would feel "negative weight." Within such a power-diving plane, you would fall upward at increasing speed (relative to the plane) unless you were strapped into your seat. This is one kind of "anti-gravity" which may not be useful but which is at least completely valid. . . .

In calculating the force of gravity at various distances from Earth and on the surface of various planets, I have, in this article, (whether actually saying so or not) given the results as so many "g", with the intensity of gravitational force on Earth's surface defined as "1 g."

But it is easy to measure the exact value of "1 g." Since forces are measured by the accelerations they induce, it is only necessary to measure the acceleration of a body dropping, let us say, from the top of the Empire State Building to the ground under the influence of gravity. It turns out that this acceleration and, therefore, the

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value of "g" (at the equator, at sea-level, and corrected for the effects of air resistance) is 980.-665 centimeters per second per second, or, in more familiar units, 31.6 feet per second per second.

This means that if an office safe is raised to a height of 5,000 feet above the Earth's surface and released, it would fall at the rate of 31.6 feet/sec after one second, twice that (63.2 feet/sec) after two seconds, three times that (94.8 feet/sec) after three seconds and so on, its rate of fall increasing smoothly with time. (Here and elsewhere in this article, I am ignoring the effects of air resistance, which is a subversive influence and a nuisance.)

The equation relating the distance (s) through which a body falls during a time (t) under gravitational acceleration is:

$$s = \tfrac{1}{2}gt^2 \quad \text{(Equation 6)}$$

The value of "g" is, of course, 31.6, and if a body is falling from 5000 feet above Earth's surface, "s" is 5,000. By substituting these figures into Equation 6, it can be solved for "t." It turns out that it will take our office safe 17.8 seconds of fall before it splashes into Earth's surface. At the time of contact, it will be moving 17.8 x 31.6 or 562.5 feet/sec. (or 0.106 miles/sec., or 381.6 miles per hour).

(It does not, by the way, matter whether we use a golf-ball or an office safe as the falling object. The inertia of an object varies directly with its mass, which means it takes twice the force to accelerate a two-pound weight at a certain rate as it does to accelerate a one-pound weight. But gravitational force also varies with the mass of the falling object in the same way, so that a two-pound weight is attracted to Earth with twice the force of a one-pound weight. Generalizing this, you can see that the end result is that all objects, whatever their mass, experience the same acceleration in a given gravitational field. The effect of air resistance on light objects such as feathers and leaves obscures this fact, and misled Aristotle—who thought a two-pound weight fell with twice the acceleration of a one-pound weight—and all who followed him down to the time of Galileo.)

The figures on fall under gravity are true in reverse also. If a cannonball is shot directly upward against Earth's gravity, at a velocity of 0.106 miles/sec as it leaves the cannon's mouth, it will travel upward (slowing constantly) for 17.8 seconds and reach a height of 5,000 feet before coming to a halt and beginning to fall back.

If our original office safe were raised to a height of 20,000 feet instead of 5,000, the time of fall would then be 35.6 seconds and the final velocity is 0.212 miles/

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sec. And if the cannon-ball were shot upward at an original velocity of 0.212 miles/sec, – but you can see that without my telling you.

It follows, generally, from equation 6, that the time of fall and the final velocity of a falling object, vary as the square root of the distance of fall, assuming a given constant value of "g." It would seem then that the final velocity at contact of office safe and Earth could be as high as you care to make it—by setting the safe to falling from a greater and greater height above the surface.

But there's a catch. I said we must assume "a given constant value of "g." " and that is exactly what we can't do.

Though the value of "g" varies with distance from the Earth's center, in lifting an office safe, or a golf ball, 5,000 or even 20,000 feet above Earth's surface, the distance from Earth's center is not significantly changed, and you can work your calculations as though "g" were constant.

But suppose you were to release your object 3,950 miles above the surface of the Earth. Up there, the value of "g" is only 0.25 and the acceleration imposed upon a falling body is therefore only a quarter of what it is here on the surface.

To be sure, the value of "g" increases as the object drops and is a full 1 g by the time it is at the collision point. Nevertheless, it takes longer for the object to complete its drop than it would have if the value of "g" were 1 all the way down, and it doesn't hit at as high a velocity as it would if the value of "g" were 1 all the way down.

Every additional thousand miles upward from Earth's surface adds less and less to the final velocity. The result is a converging series where an infinite number of smaller and smaller terms add up to a finite sum. This finite sum, in the case of objects falling toward Earth, is 6.98 miles/sec. This means that if an office safe, or anything else, were to fall from any distance, however great, its final velocity as it struck Earth would never exceed 6.98 miles/sec. (or 25,128 miles per hour).

This figure might be called the "maximum final falling velocity," but it isn't. People prefer to look at it in reverse. If a cannonball, a spaceship or anything else, were fired directly upward at a velocity of 6.98 miles/sec. (or more), it would continue moving outward indefinitely, if there were no interference from extraneous gravitational fields. (Since a fall even from an infinite distance could not create a final speed of more than 6.98 miles/sec., then the reverse follows: An initial speed of 6.98 miles/sec. or more could

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never be reduced to zero by Earth's gravitation, even if the object travelled forever.)

An object hurled out in this fashion would never return to Earth. It will not have escaped from the influence of Earth's gravitational field (which will be slowing it constantly) but it will have escaped the Earth itself.

So the velocity of 6.98 miles a second is the "escape velocity" for Earth.

The value of the escape velocity varies with the mass of the attracting body and the distance from its center, as follows:

$$v = 6.98 \sqrt{m/d} \quad \text{(Equation 7)}$$

where "v" is the escape velocity, "m" is the mass of the attracting body in "Earth-masses" and "d" the distance to the center of the attracting body in "Earth-radii." The factor, 6.98, allows the escape velocity to come out in miles per second.

The Moon, for instance, has a mass equal to 0.0123 "Earth-masses" and, at its surface, the distance from its center is 0.273 "Earth-radii." The escape velocity from the Moon's surface is therefore $6.98 \times \sqrt{0.0123/0.273}$, or 1.49 miles/sec. (5,364 miles per hour).

The escape velocities at the surface of any body in the Solar system can be similarly calculated and the results are presented in Table III.

One caution: Escape velocity is required for escape from a planet only where unpowered (i.e. "ballistic") flight is concerned. If you are in a spaceship under constant power, you can move any finite distance from Earth at any velocity below escape velocity but above zero, provided you have fuel enough. (In the same way, you cannot jump to a second story window at a bound unless the initial thrust of your leg muscles against the ground is great enough—which is more than you can manage—but you can nevertheless walk up two flights of stairs as slowly as you please.)

And yet escape from Earth may not be entirely escape, either. I said earlier in the article that an object hurled from Earth at more than escape velocity would move outward forever ". . . if there were no interference from extraneous gravitational fields."

But, of course, there *is* such interference. Consider the Sun, for instance, which so far we haven't done.

The Sun has a mass that is equal to 330,000 "Earth-masses" and a radius equal to 109 "Earth-radii." Using Equation 7, the escape velocity from the Sun's surface turns out to be a tidy 385 miles/sec. (1,386,000 miles per hour).

From Earth, however, the dis-

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Table III:

Escape Velocities at the Surface of Bodies in the Solar System

Astronomical Body	Mass (Earth-masses)	Radius (Earth-radii)	Escape Velocity (miles per second)
Jupiter (pole)	318	10.5	38.4
Jupiter (equator)	318	11.2	37.3
Saturn (pole)	95.2	8.5	23.4
Saturn (equator)	95.2	9.5	22.1
Neptune	17.3	3.4	15.8
Uranus	14.5	3.7	13.9
Earth	1.0	1.0	6.98
Venus	0.82	0.96	6.46
Mars	0.11	0.525	3.20
Mercury	0.054	0.380	2.64
Ganymede	0.026	0.395	1.80
Moon	0.0123	0.273	1.49

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tance to the Sun's center is about 23,000 "Earth-radii." Substituting that figure for "d" in Equation 7, and leaving "m" at 330,000 "Earth-masses," it turns out that the escape velocity from the Sun at Earth's distance is 26.4 miles/sec. (95,040 miles per hour).

This is nearly four times as high as the escape velocity from Earth itself. In other words, a missile shot out from Earth and attaining a velocity of 6.98 miles/sec. by the time the rocket thrust is expended, may be free of the Earth, but *it is not free of the Sun.* It will not recede forever after all, but will take up an orbit about the Sun.

To escape from the Solar System altogether, a speed of 26.4 miles/sec. must be attained in ballistic flight. To be sure, in powered flight, we don't have to attain escape velocity; we can just keep the engines going. However, the escape velocity is a measure of the amount of energy we must use to break the gravitational chains in any fashion. So you see, it is the Solar prison-bars that block our way to the stars far more than Earth's puny fence.

A consolation is that, for the moment, the Moon and the planets are enough of a challenge. The stars can wait.

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While on leave from the editorial chair of this magazine, Mr. Boucher plans to produce some science fiction of his own. He was interrupted by the recent World Science Fiction Convention, where he received a Hugo for having edited the best s.f. magazine of the year—an honor, we impartially observe, richly deserved. While we wait restlessly for the new, we bring you this example of the old—a deftly told, chilling account of a doctor who possibly wasn't, and the curious nature of . . .

The Pink Caterpillar

by Anthony Boucher

NORM HARKER SAID, "THEIR medicine men can do time travel, too. At least, that's the firm belief everywhere on the island: a *tualala* can go forward in time and bring back any single item you specify, for a price. We used to spend the night watches speculating on what would be the one best thing to order."

Norman hadn't told us the name of the island. The stripe and a half on his sleeve lent him discretion; and Tokyo hadn't learned yet what secret installations the Navy had been busy with on that minute portion of the South Pacific. He couldn't talk about the installations, of course; but the island had provided him with plenty of other matters to keep us entertained, up there in the Top of the Mark.

"What would you order, Tony," he asked, "with a *carte blanche* like that on the future?"

"How far future?"

"They say a *tualala* goes to one hundred years from date, exactly."

"Money wouldn't work," I mused. "Jewels, maybe. Or a gadget—any gadget—and you could invent it as of now and make a fortune. But then it might depend on principles not yet worked out. . . . Or the *Gone With the Wind* of the twenty-first century—but publish it now and it could lay an egg. Can you imagine today's best sellers trying to compete with Dickens? No, it's a tricky question. What did you try?"

"We finally settled on Khrushchev's tombstone. Think of the admission tickets we could sell to see that!"

"And?"

"And nothing. We couldn't pay

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the *tualala's* price. For each article fetched through time he wanted one virgin from the neighboring island. We felt the staff somehow might not understand if we went collecting them. There's always a catch to magic," Norman concluded lightly.

Fergus O'Brien said, "Uh-huh," and nodded gravely. He hadn't been saying much all evening—just sitting there and looking out over the panorama of the Bay by night, a glistening joy, now that dimout was over, and taking in Norm's stories. I still don't know the sort of work he's been doing, but it's changing him, toning him down.

But even a toned-down Irishman can stand only so much silence, and there was obviously a story ready on his lips. Norm asked, "You've been running into magic, too?"

"Not lately." Fergus held his drink up to the light. "Damned if I know why writers always call a highball an amber liquid," he observed. "Start a cliché and it sticks. . . . Like about detectives being hard-headed realists. Didn't you ever stop to think that there's hardly another profession outside the clergy that's so apt to run up against the things beyond realism? Why do you call in a detective? Because something screwy's going on and you need an explanation. And if there isn't an explanation . . .

"This was back a ways. Back when I didn't have anything worse to deal with than murderers, and once a werewolf. But he was a hell of a swell guy. The murderers I used to think were pretty thorough low-lifes, but now . . . Anyway, this was back then. I was down in Mexico putting the finishing touches on a case when I heard from Dan Rafetti. I think you know him, Tony—he's an investigator for Southwest National Life Insurance, and he's thrown some business my way now and then.

"This one sounded interesting. Nothing spectacular, you understand, and probably no money to speak of. But the kind of crazy, unexplained little detail that stirs up the O'Brien curiosity. Very simple: Southwest gets a claim from a beneficiary. One of their customers died down in Mexico, and his sister wants the cash. They sent to the Mexican authorities for a report on his death and it was heart failure and that's that. Only the policy is made out to Mr. Frank Miller and the Mexican report refers to him as *Dr.* F. Miller. They ask the sister and she's certain he hadn't any right to such a title. So I happen to be right near Tlichotl, where he died, and would I please kind of nose around and see was there anything phony, like maybe an imposture. Photographs and fingerprints—from a civil service appli-

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cation he once made—enclosed."

"Nice businesslike beginning," Norm said.

Fergus nodded. "That's the way it started, all very routine, yours-of-the-27th-*ult.* Prosaic-like. And Tlichotl was prosaic enough, too. Maybe to a tourist it'd be picturesque, but I'd been kicking around these Mexican mountain towns long enough so one seemed as commonplace as another. Sort of a montage of flat houses and white trousers and dogs and children and an old church and an almost-as-old *pulqueria* and one *tipo* that plays a hell of a guitar on Saturday nights.

"Tlichotl wasn't much different. There was a mine near it, and just out of town was a bunch of drab new frame houses for the American engineers. Everybody in town worked in the mine—all pure Indians, with those chaste profiles straight off of Aztec murals that begin to seem like the only right and normal human face when you've been among 'em long enough.

"I went to the doctor first. He was the government sanitation agent and health instructor, and the town looked like he was doing a good job. His English was better than my Spanish and he was glad I liked tequila. Yes, he remembered Dr. Miller. He checked up his records, announced that Dr. M. had died on November Second. It was January when I talked to him. Simple death; heart failure. He'd had several attacks in the previous weeks, and the doctor had expected him to go any day. All of a sudden a friend he hadn't seen in years showed up in town unannounced, and the shock did it. Any little thing might have.

"The doctor wasn't a stupid man, or a careless one. I was willing to take his word that the death was natural—and maybe I ought to put in here, before your devious minds start getting ahead of me, that as far as I ever learned he was absolutely right. Common- or garden-variety of heart failure, and that didn't fit into any picture of insurance fraud. But there was still the inconsistency of the title, and I went on, 'Must've been kind of nice for you to have a colleague here to talk with?'

"The doctor frowned a little at that. It seemed he'd been sort of hurt by Dr. Miller's attitude. He'd tried to interest him in some researches he was doing with an endemic variant of undulant fever, which he'd practically succeeded in wiping out. But the North American doctor just didn't give a damn. No fraternal spirit, no scientific curiosity, nothing.

"I gathered they hadn't been very friendly. my doctor and Dr. Miller. In fact, Miller hadn't been intimate with anybody, not even the other North Americans at the mine. He liked the Indians and

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they liked him, though they were a little scared of him on account of the skeleton — apparently an anatomical specimen and the first thing I'd heard of to go with his assumed doctorate. He had a good shortwave radio and he listened to music on that and sketched a little and read and went for short hikes. It sounded like a good life, if you like a lonely one. The doc thought they might know a little more about him at the *pulqueria;* he stopped there for a drink sometimes. And the widow Sánchez kept house for him; she might know something.

"I tried the widow first. She wore a shapeless black dress that looked as though she'd started mourning Mr. Sanchez ten years ago, but the youngest wasn't quite walking yet. She liked her late employer, might he rest in peace. He was a good man, and so little trouble. No, he never gave medicine to anybody; that was the job of the *señor médico* from Mexico City. No, he never did anything with bottles. No, he never received much mail and surely not with money in it, for she often saw him open his few letters. But yes, indeed, he was a *médico;* did he not have the bones, the *esquéleto* to prove it?

"And if the señor interested himself so much in *el doctor* Miller, perhaps the señor would care to see his house? It was untouched, as he left it. No one lived there now. No, it was not haunted —at least, not that anyone knew, though no man knows about such things. It was only that no one new ever comes to live in Tlichotl, and an empty house stays empty.

"I looked the house over. It had two rooms and a kitchen and a tiny patio. Dr. Miller's things were undisturbed; no one had claimed them, and it was up to time and heat and insects to take care of them. There was the radio and beside it the sketching materials. One wall was a bookcase, well filled, mostly with sixteenth and seventeenth century literature in English and Spanish. The books had been faithfully read. There were a few recent volumes, mostly on travel or on Mexican Indian culture, and a few magazines. No medical books or periodicals.

"Food, cooking utensils, clothing, a pile of sketches—good enough so you'd feel all right when you'd done them and bad enough so you wouldn't feel urged to exhibit them—pipes and tobacco. These just about made up the inventory. No papers to speak of, a few personal letters, mostly from his sister (and beneficiary). No instruments or medicines of any kind. Nothing whatsoever out of the way—not even the skeleton.

"I'd heard about that twice, so I asked what had become of it. The sons of the mining engineers, the young demons, had stolen it to celebrate a gringo holiday,

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which I gathered had been Halloween. They had built an enormous bonfire and the skeleton had fallen in and been consumed. The doctor Miller had been very angry; he had suffered one of his attacks then, almost as bad as the one that gave him death, may the Lord hold him in his kindness. But now it was time for mother to return and feed her brood; her house was mine, and would the señor join in her poor supper?

"The beans were good and the tortillas were wonderful; and the youngest children hadn't ever seen red hair before and had some pointed questions to ask me about mine. And in the middle of the meal something suddenly went *click* in my brain and I knew why Frank Miller had called himself doctor."

Fergus paused and beckoned to a waiter.

Norman said, "Is that all?"

"For the moment. I'm giving you boys a chance to scintillate. There you have all the factors up to that point. All right: *Why* was Miller calling himself doctor?"

"He wasn't practicing," Norman said slowly. "And he wasn't even running a fake medical racket by mail, as people have done from Mexico to avoid the U. S. Post Office Department."

"And," I added, "he hadn't assumed the title to impress people, to attain social standing, because he had nothing to do with his neighbors. And he wasn't carrying on any experiments or research for which he might have needed the title in his writings. So he gained nothing in cash or prestige. All right, what other reason is there for posing as a doctor?"

"Answer," said Fergus leisurely, "he wasn't posing as a doctor. Look: you might pose as a doctor with no props at all, thinking no one would come in your house but the housekeeper. Or you might stage an elaborate front complete with instrument cabinets and five-pound books. But you wouldn't try it with just one prop—an anatomical skeleton."

Norman and I looked at each other and nodded. It made sense. "Well, then?" I asked.

The fresh drinks came and Fergus said, "My round. . . . Well, then, the skeleton was not a prop for the medical pose. Quite the reverse. Turn it around and it makes sense. He called himself a doctor *to account for the skeleton.*"

I choked on my first sip and Norman spluttered a little, too. Fergus went on eagerly, with that keen light in his green eyes, "You can't hide a skeleton in a tiny house. The housekeeper's bound to see it, and word gets around. Miller liked the Indians, and he liked peace. He had to account for the skeleton. So he became a doctor."

"But that—" Norman objected,

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"that's no kind of answer. That's just another question."

"I know," said Fergus. "But that's the first big step in detection: to find the right question. And that's it: Why does a man live with a skeleton?"

We were silent for a little while. The Top of the Mark was full of glasses and smoke and uniforms; and despite the uniforms it seemed a room set aside that was not part of a world at war—still less, of a world in which a man might live with a skeleton.

"Of course you checked the obvious answer," I said at last.

Fergus nodded. "He couldn't very well have been a black magician, if that's what you mean, or white either. Not a book or a note in the whole place dealing with the subject. No wax, chalk, incense or what-have-you. The skeleton doesn't fit any more into a magical pattern than into a medical one."

"The Dead Beloved?" Norman suggested, hesitantly uttering the phrase in mocking capitals. "Rose-for-Emily stuff? A bit grisly, but not inconceivable."

"The Mexican doctor saw the skeleton. It was a man, and not a young one."

"Then he was planning an insurance fraud—burn the house down and let the bones be found while he vanished."

"*A*, You don't burn adobe. *B*, You don't let the skeleton be seen by the doctor who'll examine it later. *C*, It was a much taller man than Miller."

"A writer?" I ventured wildly. "I've sometimes thought myself a skeleton might be useful in the study—to check where to inflict skull wounds and such."

"With no typewriter, no manuscripts, and very little mail?"

Norman's face lit up. "You said he sketched. Maybe he was working on a modern *Totentanz*—dance-of-death allegory. Holbein and Dürer must have had a skeleton or two around."

"I saw his sketches. Landscapes only."

I lit my pipe and settled back. "All right. We've stooged, and we don't know. Now tell us why a man keeps house with a set of bones." My tone was lighter than necessary.

Fergus said, "I won't go into all the details of my investigations. I saw damned near every adult in Tlichotl and most of the kids. And I pieced out what I think is the answer. But you ought to be able to gather it from the evidence of four people.

"First, Jim Reilly, mining engineer. Witness deposeth and saith he was on the main street, if you can call it that, of Tlichotl on November second. He saw Dr. Miller walking along 'like in a kind of nervous haze.' He saw a stranger, 'swarthy but not a Mex,' walk up to Miller and say, 'Frank!'

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Miller looked up and was astonished. The stranger said, 'Sorry for the delay. But it took me a little time to get here.' And he hadn't finished the sentence before Miller dropped dead. Queried about stranger, witness says he gave his name as Humbert Targ. He stayed around town a few days for the funeral and then left. Said he'd known Miller a long time ago—never quite clear where, but seemingly in the South Seas, as we used to say before we learned to call it the South Pacific. Asked for description, witness proved pretty useless: medium height, medium age, dark complexion. . . . Only helpful details: stranger wore old clothes. 'Shabby?' 'No, just old.' 'Out-of-date?' 'I guess so.' 'How long ago? What kind?' 'I don't know. Just old—funny-looking.' He had only one foot. 'One leg?' 'No, two legs, just one foot.' 'Wooden peg?' 'No, just empty trouser cuff. Walked with a cane.'

"Second witness, Father Gonza—and it's a funny sensation talking to a priest who wears just a plain business suit. He hadn't known Dr. Miller well, though he'd said a mass for his soul. But one night Miller came from the *pulquería* to the priest's house and insisted on talking to him. He wanted to know how you could ever get right with God and yourself if you'd done someone a great wrong and there was no conceivable way you could make it up to him. The padre asked why, was the injured person dead? Miller hesitated and didn't answer. 'He's alive, then?' 'Oh, no, no!' 'Restitution could surely be made to the next of kin if it were a money matter?' 'No, it's personal.' Father's advice was to pray for the injured party's soul and for grace to avoid such temptation another time. I don't see much what else he could have suggested, but Miller wasn't satisfied."

I wasn't hearing the noise around us any more. Norman was leaning forward, too, and I saw in his eyes that he, too, was beginning to feel the essential *wrongness* of the case that the detective had stumbled on.

"Third witness, the widow Sánchez. She told me some more about the skeleton when I came back for more beans and brought a bottle of red wine to go with them, which it did magnificently. Miller had treasured his skeleton very highly. She was supposed not even to dust it. But once she forgot and dusted it, and a finger came off. This was in October. She thought he might not notice a missing finger, but she knew she'd catch it if he found a loose one; so she burned the bones in the charcoal brazier over which she fried her tortillas. Two days later she was serving the doctor his dinner when she saw a pink

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caterpillar crawling near his place. She'd never seen a pink caterpillar before. She flicked it away with a napkin, but not before the doctor saw it. He jumped up from the table and ran to look at the skeleton and gave her a terrific bawling-out. After that she saw the caterpillar several times. It was about then that Miller started having these heart attacks. Whenever she saw the caterpillar it was crawling toward the doctor. I looked at her a long time while she finished the wine, and then I said, 'Was it a caterpillar?' She crossed herself and said, 'No.' She said it very softly and that was all she said that night."

I looked down at the table. My hand lay there and the index finger was tapping gently. We sat in quite a draft, and I shuddered.

"Fourth witness, Timmy Reilly, twelve-year-old son of Jim. He thought it was a great lark that they'd stolen the old boy's bones for Halloween. Fun and games. 'These dopes down here didn't know from nothing about Halloween but him and the gang, they sure showed 'em.' But I could see he was holding something back. I made a swap. He could wear my detective badge (which I've never worn yet) for a whole day if he'd tell me what else he knew. So he showed it to me: the foot that he'd rescued when the skeleton was burned up. He'd tried to grab the bones as they toppled over and all he could reach was the heel. He had the whole foot, well-articulated and lousy with tarsals and stuff. So I made a better deal: he could have the badge for keeps—with the number scratched out a little—if he'd let me burn the foot. He let me."

Fergus paused, and it all began to click into place. The pattern was clear, and it was a pattern that should not be.

"You've got it now?" Fergus said quietly. "All I needed to make it perfect was Norm's story. There had to be such things as *tualalas*, with such powers as theirs. I'd deduced them, but it's satisfying to have them confirmed.

"Miller had an enemy many years ago—a man who had sworn to kill him. And Miller knew a *tualala*, back there in the South Seas. And when he asked himself what would be the best single item to bring back from the future, he knew the answer: *his enemy's skeleton.*

"It wasn't murder. He probably had scruples about that. He sounded like a good enough guy in a way, and maybe his *tualala* asked a more possible price than Norm's. The skeleton was the skeleton that would exist naturally a hundred years from now, no matter how or when the enemy died. But bring that skeleton back here, and the enemy can no longer

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exist. His skeleton can't be two places at once. You've got the dry dead bones. What becomes of the live ones with flesh on them? You don't know. You don't care. You're safe. You're free to lead the peaceful life you want with Indians and mountain scenery and your sketch pad and your radio. And your skeleton.

"You've got to be careful of that skeleton. If it ceases to exist in this time, the full-fleshed living skeleton might return. You mustn't ever take a chance on the destruction of a little piece. You lose a finger, and a finger returns —a pink thing that crawls, and always toward you.

"Then the skeleton itself is destroyed—all but one foot. You're in mortal terror, but nothing happens. Two days go by, and it's November second. You know what the second of November is like in Latin America? It's All Souls Day in the churches, and they call it the *Día de los difuntos* —the Day of the Dead. But it isn't a sad day, outside of church. You go to the cemetery, and it's a picnic. There are skeletons everywhere, same as our Halloween—bright, funny skeletons that never hurt anybody. And there are skulls to wear and skulls to drink out of, and bright white sugar skulls with pink-and-green trimmings to eat. All along every street are vendors with skulls and skeletons. And there you are in the midst of skeletons, skeletons everywhere, and your skeleton is gone and all your safety with it. And there on the street with all the skulls dipping and bowing at you, you see him and he isn't a skull any more. He's Humbert Targ, only with just one foot and he's explaining that it took a little time to get here.

"Wouldn't you drop dead?" Fergus concluded simply.

My throat felt dry as I asked, "What did you tell the insurance company?"

"Much like Norm's theory. Man was an artist, had an anatomical model, gave out he was a doctor to keep the natives from conniption fits. The prints they sent me fitted what I found in his home and they had to pay the sister. Collected expenses but no bonus."

Norman cleared his throat. "I'm beginning to hope they don't send me back to the island."

"Afraid you might get too tempted by a *tualala*?"

"No. But on the island we really do have pink caterpillars. I'm not sure I could face them."

"There's one thing I still wonder," Fergus said reflectively. "Where was Humbert Targ while his skeleton hung at Miller's side? Or should I say *when* was he? He said, 'It took a little time to get here.' From where? From when? And what kind of time?"

There are some questions you don't even try to answer.

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Miriam Allen deFord has written many admirable science-fantasies for this and other magazines; but she is even better known as an author of unconventional and incisive stories of murder. Her latest murder tale is so unconventional as to belong here rather than in the pages of, say, Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine: *it deals with a murder which was thoroughly and bloodily executed . . . and which never happened at all.*

Timequake

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

AT 8:04½ P.M. ON MONDAY, APRIL 16, 1979, there was a sudden timequake affecting all the Solar System. A fault in the space-time continuum, an old warp that had existed for billennia, abruptly slipped, and it instantly became 8:04½ A.M. again that same day in every time zone, with everything just as it had been that morning.

Business deals consummated after months of endeavor had to be accomplished all over again. Men sinking into death resumed the painful breathing that had ceased at last. Women fresh from the agony of giving birth were back where they had started twelve hours before. Brides re-became virgins—if such they had been at their weddings. Convicted criminals who had heard themselves sentenced had again to face that ordeal, knowing in advance what it would be. Children had before them another spring day of happy play, or of school problems, or of boredom. People knew beforehand that that day they had broken their legs, or lost their wallets, or proposed marriage and been turned down, or received news of an unexpected legacy.

And young Terry Falconer, who at eight o'clock that evening had been running from the memory of the crushed, bloody body of the man he had killed, was not yet a murderer.

So many strange things had happened in the world by 1979 that nearly everybody took the timequake in stride, once it was hastily explained over all mass communication media by an international committee of scientists immediately alerted by the UN. The inevitable had only to be stoically endured, ameliorated as

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best could be by scientific assistance: the exhausted new mother had to brace herself for another season of pain, as suddenly the baby she had seen for a moment became again unborn and her labor rebegan—at least she knew now that it was healthy and perfect, and whether she had a son or a daughter. The dying perhaps knew, the first of all human beings, what it means to die; but for the most part they were already too near death to be able to think clearly or to communicate at all. The criminal knew how long he must serve; the bride what the consummation she had dreamed of would be—or perhaps the criminal could hope for a desperate escape, the bride could change her mind.

For the crux of the whole unprecedented situation, of course, was whether this second April 16 must be merely a repetition of the first one, or whether the past could be changed in the new present. If a law had been passed on that first April 16, for example, could a violator of it on the second April 16 be punished, or must the law be re-enacted? What of contracts signed between management and labor? What of political treaties and agreements? What of business and professional deals, down even to the keeping of appointments?

Very quickly, from the mere fact of deciding to have eggs instead of cereal for breakfast on that second Monday morning, or of catching instead of missing a bus, or of buying a green hat instead of a vanished red one, it became apparent that this was truly a new twelve hours, as different and unique as the one had been which now was no more. It was years before tangled issues arising from the timequake reached the highest tribunals. Some disputes, from their very nature, never could be adjudicated. But the consensus was that the present is Now, and that every present supersedes every past.

What that meant to Terry Falconer, on the second April 16, was that now he must not rush in fury to find Otto Raff, accuse him of an intolerable injury, and then in sudden unconquerable rage catch up the nearest golf club—it was on the links that he had found his employer, late on that first Monday afternoon—and beat the older man until he lay still and broken. Now he knew what it meant to be a murderer. Now he could summon the self-control to confront Raff and have it out with him reasonably, man to man.

When, cowering in his old 1977 car, in the dark on the edge of the airport, waiting for a plane to carry him out of at least immediate reach of the law, Falconer incredulously saw night in an instant become day, his first reaction (it was that of many) was

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to think that despite his terror and confusion he had somehow fallen asleep, and that it was the next morning. Tuning in his car TV to find if there were news of the murder or of his flight, he heard instead the astounding pronouncement of the committee of scientists.

More than most who heard, Terry Falconer was predisposed to accept at once this extraordinary statement: he *needed* a miracle. He turned the car and drove back through byways to the city. At a newsstand in a quiet side street he bought a morning paper. It was dated "Monday, April 16, 1979," just as "yesterday's" had been; and in enormous headlines it confirmed what his ears had just heard. He was (together with others who might have committed murder on that superseded day) the first killer in the history of mankind to have been given another chance. Soberly he drove back to the house from which he had fled so precipitantly. Everything was in the disorder in which he had left it. Eve was not there.

That first Monday morning had certainly included no drive home from the airport. Falconer needed no further assurance to be certain that the twelve hours which had slipped into the warp of time were really canceled. But since he, and presumably everybody else, could remember the events of those hours only too clearly, the cancellation must be objective only, not subjective. He had yet to cope with Otto Raff, restored from the dead.

Falconer arrived at the office at 9:00 as usual. Raff, the president of the company, never turned up until 9:30. In Terry Falconer's desk drawer was locked the file from which all this evil had sprung. He got it out and read it again. The latter by plain implication accused him of compounding a felony.

He was watching, but Raff must have come in by his private door. Terry's intercom squawked and a secretarial voice said Mr. Falconer was wanted in Mr. Raff's office. Terry braced his shoulders. The whole office was at sixes and sevens, trying to get things straightened out from "yesterday's" activities; nobody noticed as he went, feeling cold around the mouth and with flutters in his stomach, through Raff's anteroom into the big office.

What do you say to a man you murdered?

"Well, Terry," Raff greeted him. There was a long silence.

Falconer forced his eyes up from tracing the pattern of the rug. Raff was perfectly calm, even amiable. But his right hand lay on the desk—and in it was a revolver.

"Tell me what happened," he went on in his quiet voice. "And tell me why."

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Falconer had to clear his throat twice before he could speak.

"What do you remember?" he croaked.

"You killed me, didn't you? All right, I'll tell you what I can remember of it. You came up to me while I was playing over the course alone. I thought something had happened, here or at home, your eyes were so wild. You began blurting out something I couldn't even understand. I said, 'Wait a minute, Terry. What's wrong?' Then all I remember is seeing you grab one of my clubs. Before I could move, it crashed against my head. That's the end—I blacked out right away. Did I die?"

"Not then," said Falconer in a low voice. "I kept on till you did."

"By an incredible chance, it's as if it never was. And you won't do it again—I've seen to that." He raised the gun slightly.

"I wouldn't, anyway."

"What's it all about?"

"It was the Mohler file. I had to go through it for something in Mohler's claim, and I found—I found—"

"You found a copy of the letter I wrote Mohler on the third. That was my error. I should have kept it out of the file. But did you *believe* it?"

"Why not?"

"I should have told you beforehand. But it was so obvious—it never occurred to me you wouldn't know what it meant, if you ever happened to run across it. As a matter of fact, I never expected you to have that file at all—it was McKenzie's case, and I didn't know he'd turned it over to you when he was laid up. He knew all about it; in fact, we cooked it up between us."

Falconer reddened.

"Then he . . . knows about me too?"

"My dear boy, everybody on that level 'knows about' you, as you put it. Nobody cares. I couldn't take you on without telling the others to whom you're responsible. The bonding company insisted on it, for one thing."

"So I came in handy when you needed a fall guy, is that it?"

The revolver wiggled again.

"Self-discipline, Terry! Mohler is making a false claim against the company—we know it and he knows we know it, but we can't prove it and he knows that too. He wouldn't dare bring it to court, but he thought he could bluff us. I decided to fight fire with fire—our lie against his lie. Yes, if you want to think of it that way, you were the only man against whom we could make the accusation with some show of likelihood. The thing would be safe with him, he'd never make it public, for his own sake. He knew it wasn't true, that you never were his accomplice, but he couldn't say so, or make any fuss

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about it, for fear of exposing his own cheating. It worked; two days ago I got a letter from him, withdrawing his claim. The whole thing's over."

"With me as the goat tethered for the tiger to eat so you could shoot it."

Raff smiled placatingly.

"I don't blame you for being sore, Terry. I grant I made a mistake in not getting your permission first. I guess I must have felt unconsciously that you'd understand. After all, you know you're innocent, that the accusation was untrue and I must have had a reason for making it. And why in heaven's name should you think I was purposely framing you? Your dad and I were good friends as long as he lived, Terry, you know that. I took you into the business when most people wouldn't, after that... episode when you were just a crazy kid. Why should I suddenly turn on you now?"

The word burst out of Falconer. "Eve!"

"Eve?" Otto Raff looked bewildered. "What on earth has she to do with it? I presume you've told her all your past history long ago—haven't you?" Terry nodded. "Then how could my little manœuver with that crook Mohler affect your wife?

"Oh-oh, I see." Raff whistled ruefully. "I did goof, didn't I? I was stupid. It never entered my head that you could take the thing seriously. I suppose you even imagine I was intending to have you sent to prison, away from her."

"Back to prison," said Falconer bitterly. "So that I'd be out of the way, and give you and Eve—"

The older man gazed at him in blank amazement.

"I—Eve—what in God's name are you driving at? Do you imagine—could you possibly imagine —" He laughed. "I don't want to hurt your feelings, my boy—Eve's a charming girl, as sweet as she's pretty. But good heavens, to me she's just a child. You two are like my own children. How on earth could it have entered your silly, jealous mind that I'd be interested —that way, in Eve? Thank you, I prefer my women to be of my own generation!"

He opened a drawer of the desk and laid the revolver in it. He looked at Terry Falconer quietly, an expression of mingled amusement and chagrin on his face.

"How melodramatic, Terry! Now I'm supposed to be in love with your wife, is that it? And so, though I've been about the best friend you ever had, though I took you into my own business after you'd served time as a boy—not, I grant, for theft; I could never have put that over on the bonding company; just for assault (that dreadful temper of yours again)—though I've given you every boost up the ladder, was as

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happy over your marriage as if I'd been your own father, looked forward to the day when you'd be really grown up emotionally, the day when I could confidently think of passing on the whole business to you when I was through with it . . . after all that you could still believe that I was deliberately framing you, so as to get rid of you and carry on some imaginary affair with Eve!

"Terry, Terry! I was a fool, I admit, not to talk to you before I wrote that letter to Mohler. I should have done it; it wasn't fair to you. But that you should jump to such a horrible conclusion —that you should let yourself get again into such an insane rage, and rush off to murder me, your old friend, your benefactor! Terry, it's hard to take in.

"This impossible thing that happened last night—this timequake, the scientist fellows call it—if it hadn't been for that I'd be dead now, and you'd be a hunted criminal, and Eve a murderer's wife. Terry, it makes me feel . . . religious. How does it make you feel?"

"Ashamed," Falconer whispered.

Raff got to his feet, walked around the desk, and put his hand on the young man's shoulder.

"You've had something nobody ever had before in the history of the world, Terry," he said. "We've all had it—everybody alive today. Another chance: a chance to make up for our mistakes. Don't be ashamed—just be everlastingly grateful.

"And now, like millions of other people, let's pretend yesterday or whatever you want to call it didn't happen. We won't forget it, either of us; we can't. But we can learn our lessons and go on from there. I'll learn not to be so smart and not to involve other people in a scheme unless I have their consent first: that was my offense. And you, my boy, you'll learn again, and for good this time, that lack of self-control inevitably leads to disaster. I have a hunch that from now on that low threshold of anger in your make-up is going to be a lot higher than it has been in the past. Next time, you'll be able to ask for an explanation before you thrash out blindly. Am I right?"

Falconer nodded, unable to speak.

"Go on home now, Terry. I'm going to close the whole office for the rest of the day; everybody's too upset to work, and everybody has private problems to settle because of this unbelievable time performance. So clean up your desk and beat it. You'll probably find Eve's office has sent her home too.

"And if you want my advice, keep your mouth shut to her about this whole affair. It would only make her unhappy, and it's all

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over. Unless—how much *does* she know?"

"Nothing. When I went home after—when I went home afterwards she wasn't back yet, and this morning she'd left before I got there. I just packed some things and got in the car and beat it. I was trying to get away before—before they found out. I was at the airport, waiting for a plane, when the timequake happened. Of course, she must know I was out all night, and that the car was gone."

"Tell her I sent you on a sudden trip and that you forgot to leave a note for her—you've made plenty of quick trips for us that way in the past."

"All right. And—and I can't tell you—"

"Don't try. So far as I'm concerned nothing ever happened—as long as I'm alive and well today."

Terry Falconer gripped Otto Raff's hand hard, struggling to keep down the lump that rose in his throat. He turned and hurried from the office. In half an hour he would be safe home with Eve: Eve, who was his as he was hers; Eve, to whom a lifetime of devotion would not make up for the suspicions that had tortured him ever since the jealous pang when he had surprised a look of affection between his wife and Otto Raff, and built up from it the monstrous structure that only a miracle of nature had preserved from being fatal to all three of them.

Alone again in his office, Raff called his secretary and told her to serve notice that the employees might all leave for the remainder of the day. Then he put on his hat and left by the private door. Downstairs he went at once to a phone booth and dialed a number.

"Eve?" he said into the receiver. "It's all right, darling, everything's fixed up.

"Now don't be upset—it didn't happen; yesterday didn't exist. He's on his way home now—I let everybody go. I knew you'd be there; I checked with your Mr. Ellins as soon as I came in. He'll have some story to tell you about where he was when the timequake happened—just pretend to believe it. Don't cry, sweetie—just be my brave girl and get through today, and everything will be perfectly all right. Sure I'll be careful—I'll be protected from now on. Don't worry; I've got him calmed down like a lamb.

"In a way it's a good thing it happened as it did. I've got things fixed now so that it will work out a lot better than the other way that failed. I had it coming to me—you warned me to take that letter out of the file, but I just plain forgot. But nothing like that will be necessary any more.

"Yes, of course I do, darling.

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And you? . . . Bless you, sweet child, you make me feel young again!"

There are those who think that it is better for our moral fiber to have our noses rubbed in unpleasant truths. There are others who subscribe to the ancient cliché that what we don't know won't hurt us. The latter will agree that the timequake was a blessing to all three of them—Raff, Eve, and Terry. Raff at least learned to keep secrets where they couldn't leak out, and that it is easier as well as kinder to keep a deceived husband ignorant and contented than to try to get rid of him by the road of ignominy and disgrace. Eve was saved from open scandal. As for Terry, who is to say that it is not better to live out one's years as an innocent and happy cuckold than bring one's life down in ruins by the murder from which only the timequake rescued him?

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Surely Fritz Leiber is (among many other distinctions) the most vividly visual *of all science-fantasy writers. You will not have forgotten the images so distinctly evoked in* The Big Trek *(F&SF, October, 1957) or in* A Deskful of Girls *(April, 1958) or in so many other Leiber stories here and elsewhere; nor are you apt to forget the strange nocturne of*

Little Old Miss Macbeth

by FRITZ LEIBER

THE SPHERE OF DIM LIGHT FROM the electric candle on the orange crate was enough to show the cot, a little bare wall behind it and concrete floor beneath it, a shrouded birdcage on the other side of the cot, and nothing more. Spent batteries and their empty boxes overflowed the top of the orange crate and made a little mound. Three fresh batteries remained in a box by the candle.

The little old woman turned and tossed in her sleep under the blankets. Her face was troubled and her mouth pursed in a thin line that turned downward at the corners—a tragic mask scaled down for a little old lady. At times, without waking, she'd creep her hands up from under the blanket and touch her ears, as though they were assaulted by noise—though the silence was profound.

At last, as if she could bear it no longer, she slowly sat up. Her eyes opened, though she did not wake, staring out with the fixity of unconscious seeing. She put her feet into snug felt slippers with a hole in the left toe. She took a woolly bathrobe from the foot of the cot and pulled it around her. Without looking, still sitting on the edge of the cot, she reached for the electric candle. Then she got up and crossed the floor to a door, carrying the candle, which made on the ceiling a circle of light that followed her. At no time was the full size of the room revealed. Her face was still a prim little tragic mask, eyes open, fast asleep.

Outside the door she went down one flight of an iron stairway, which sounded from its faint deep ringing under her light tread as if there were many more flights

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above. She went through another door, a heavy, softly moaning one like the stage door of a theater, and closed it behind her and stood still.

If you'd been there outside, you'd have seen her holding the electric candle, and a small semicircle of brick wall and iron door behind her and another semicircle of sidewalk under her feet, and nothing more, no other side to the street, no nothing — the feeble light went no further. Then after a while you'd have noticed a ribbon of faint stars overhead—a narrow ribbon, too narrow to show constellations, as if the unseen buildings here were very high. And if you'd have looked up a second time, you'd have wondered if a few of the stars hadn't moved or changed color, or if there weren't extra stars now or missing ones, and it would have worried you.

The little old lady didn't wait long. She started down the street in the dim globe of light from her electric candle, keeping close to the curb, so that even the wall on her side of the street was almost lost in darkness. Her felt slippers scuffed softly. Otherwise the city, for that was what it seemed to be, was absolutely quiet. Except that after a couple of blocks a very faint angry buzzing became audible. And the corner at the next cross street was outlined now by an extremely faint red glow, the exact color of neon signs.

The old lady turned the corner into a block that was crawling with luminous worms, about forty or fifty of them, as thick as your thumb and long as your arm, though some were shorter. They weren't bright enough to show anything but themselves. They were all colors, but neon red was commonest. They moved like caterpillars but a little faster. They looked like old neon tubes come alive and crawled down out of signs, but blackened and dimmed by ages of ions. They crawled in sine curves on the sidewalks and street, a few of them on ledges a little way up the walls, and one or two along what must have been wires hanging overhead. As they moved they buzzed and the wires sang.

They seemed to be aware of the little old lady, for two or three came and circled her, keeping outside her dim globe of light. When she turned at the next corner a mercury-violet one followed her a little way, lifting its head to buzz and crackle angrily, exactly like a defective neon sign.

This block was black again with just the ribbon of elusive stars. But although the little old lady still kept close to the curb, the sidewalk was narrower and the electric candle showed wrecked display windows with jagged edges and occasional stretches of almost unbroken, thick glass. The

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old lady's eyes, seeing in her sleep, didn't waver to either side, but if you'd have been there you'd have dimly seen dummies behind the broken windows, the men in zoot suits and wide-brimmed hats, the women in tight skirts and glimmering blouses, and although they stood very stiff you'd have wondered if their eyes didn't follow the little old lady as she passed, and there'd have been no way for you to know, as soon as her globe of light was gone, that they didn't step out carefully between the glass razors and follow.

In the next block a ghost light swirled across a flatness that began about a story up in the dark. It seemed to be something moving through the ten thousand bulbs of an old theater marquee, barely quickening for an instant their brittle old filaments — a patchy, restless shimmer. Across the street, but rather higher, there appeared, on the very threshold of vision, a number of large rectangular signs, their murky colors irregularly revealed and concealed—giant bats crawling across almost completely faded luminescent billboards would have given the effect. While at least twenty stories up, at the edge of the dubious starlight, one small window spilled yellow light.

Halfway down the next block the little old lady turned in from the curb to a fence of iron pickets. She leaned against a gate, giving a querulous little moan, the only sound she'd uttered, and it swung in, crunching against the gravel.

She pressed it shut behind her and walked ahead, her slippers crushing dead leaves, her thin nostrils wrinkling mindlessly at the smell of weeds and dust. Directly overhead a small square of stars projected from the ribbon. She went up wooden steps and across a porch and through a six-paneled door that creaked as she opened and shut it.

The halls of the house were bare and its stairs uncarpeted and its woodwork tritely ornate. When she reached the third floor with her dim globe of light there was the faintest crunch from below and a little later a creaking. She took hold of a rope that hung from above and added some of her weight to it, swaying a little, and a ladder swung out of the ceiling and bumped against the floor.

She mounted the ladder, stooping, breathing just a little heavily, into a low attic. Her candle showed boxes and trunks and boxes, piles of folded draperies, a metal-ribbed dressmaker's dummy and the horn of an old phonograph.

Then you would have heard it: *pling!*—four seconds, six, seven—another *pling!*—another seven seconds — *pling!* again — *pling!* — *pling!*—*pling!*

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The torment in her sleeping face deepened. She crossed between the piles to a sink against the wall. On the lip of the single verdigrised faucet a drop slowly formed as she approached and just as she got there it fell—*pling!*—and a quick spasm crossed her face.

She put down the electric candle on the drainboard and took the handle of the faucet in both hands and leaned against it, not looking at it. There was one more *pling!* but then no more. She touched the lip of the faucet with a finger and it came away barely wet. She waited but no new drop formed.

Then her face smoothed out into a small mask of dispassion, the mouth thin and straight, and she took up her candle and started back. On the ladder and stairs and out on the walk and the street she was no longer alone. Presences thronged around her, angry and menacing, just beyond the candle's glow, and leaves crackled under other feet than her own. The light from the high window by the stars pulsed poisonously green, the winged shapes crawled more restlessly across the spent luminescence of the billboards, and all the witch-light in the theater marquee drained down into the lowest bulbs, the ones nearest her as she passed.

The wrecked display windows in the Block of the Babes and Zoot-Suiters were all empty.

In the Street of the Neon Worms the colored crawlers all came swiftly toward her, buzzing loudly and angrily, more cracklingly than bees, swarming close to her feet in ribbons of rainbow fire and following her around the corner for half a block.

But none of these things, nor the perceptible dimming of her electric candle, ruffled for one instant her expression of calm security.

She mounted the iron stairs, crossed the boundless room, sat down on the cot and put the electric candle on the orange crate among the heaped dead batteries.

One of them rolled off and hit the floor with a little *tump!* She started, quivered her head and blinked her eyes. Wakefulness had at last come into them. She sat motionless for a while, remembering. She sighed once and smiled a little smile, then she sat up straighter and her thin silvery eyebrows drew together in a frown of determination. She found a fountain pen and a small pad of onionskin paper among the batteries. She tucked a scrap of carbon paper under the top sheet and wrote rapidly for a minute. She tore off the top sheet, folded it and rolled it up tightly, then tucked it into an aluminum cylinder hardly bigger than a paper match.

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She got up and went around the cot. She took the cover off the birdcage, opened the small door, and took out a black pigeon. Moaning to it affectionately, she wired the cylinder to one foot. Then she kissed its beak and threw it into the darkness. There was a flapping which grew steadily fainter, then suddenly broke off, as if the bird had winged through a window.

The dim globe of light had shrunk to half its original size, but it was still enough to show the little old lady's face as she got into bed and pulled up the blankets. Her eyes were closed now. She sighed once more and the corners of her lips lifted in another little smile. She became still, the blankets rising and falling almost imperceptibly over her chest, and the smile stayed.

The light was also enough to show the carbon of her note, which read:

Dear Evangeline,

I was overjoyed to receive your note and discover that you too at last have a city of your own and of course your own things. *How is Louisville since the Destruction? Quiet, I trust. Pittsburgh is* so noisy. *I am thinking of moving to Cincinnati. Do you know if it has a tenant?*

Yours very truly,
Miss Macbeth

EDITOR'S NOTE: **Next month we bring you "The Silver Eggheads," a new novelet by Fritz Leiber, full of rich and varied excitement. Do not on any account consider missing it.**

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A vintage Wodehousian ghost story—about a house that was perfectly impossible, a wholesome, girl-fearing bachelor, and an authentic type dog that did his level best to save his master from frightful peril . . . the whole offering valuable observations on the evils of sweetness and light.

Honeysuckle Cottage

by P. G. Wodehouse

"Do you believe in ghosts?" asked Mr. Mulliner, abruptly.

I weighed the question thoughtfully. I was a little surprised, for nothing in our previous conversation had suggested the topic.

"Well," I replied, "I don't like them, if that's what you mean. I was once butted by one as a child."

"Ghosts. Not goats."

"Oh, ghosts? Do I believe in ghosts?"

"Exactly."

"Well, yes—and no."

"Let me put it another way," said Mr. Mulliner, patiently. "Do you believe in haunted houses? Do you believe that it is possible for a malign influence to envelop a place and work a spell on all who come within its radius?"

I hesitated.

"Well, no—yes."

Mr. Mulliner sighed a little. He seemed to be wondering if I was always as bright as this.

"Of course," I went on, "one has read stories. Henry James' *Turn on the Screw*—"

"I am not talking about fiction."

"Well, in real life— Well, look here, I once, as a matter of fact, did meet a man who knew a fellow—"

"My distant cousin James Rodman spent some weeks in a haunted house," said Mr. Mulliner, who, if he has a fault, is not a very good listener. "It cost him five thousand pounds. That is to say, he sacrificed five thousand pounds by not remaining there. Did you ever," he asked, wandering, it seemed to me, from the subject, "hear of Leila J. Pinckney?"

Naturally I had heard of Leila

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J. Pinckney. Her death some years ago has diminished her vogue, but at one time it was impossible to pass a book-shop or a railway bookstall without seeing a long row of her novels. I had never myself actually read any of them, but I knew that in her particular line of literature, the Squashily Sentimental, she had always been regarded by those entitled to judge as pre-eminent. The critics usually headed their reviews of her stories with the words:

ANOTHER PINCKNEY

or sometimes, more offensively:

ANOTHER PINCKNEY!!!

And once, dealing with, I think, *The Love Which Prevails,* the literary expert of the *Scrutinizer* had compressed his entire critique into the single phrase "Oh, God!"

"Of course," I said. "But what about her?"

"She was James Rodman's aunt."

"Yes?"

"And when she died James found that she had left him five thousand pounds and the house in the country where she had lived for the last twenty years of her life."

"A very nice little legacy."

"Twenty years," repeated Mr. Mulliner. "Grasp that, for it has a vital bearing on what follows. Twenty years, mind you, and Miss Pinckney turned out two novels and twelve short stories regularly every year, besides a monthly page of Advice to Young Girls in one of the magazines. That is to say, forty of her novels and no fewer than two hundred and forty of her short stories were written under the roof of Honeysuckle Cottage."

"A pretty name."

"A nasty, sloppy name," said Mr. Mulliner, severely, "which should have warned my distant cousin James from the start. Have you a pencil and a piece of paper?" He scribbled for a while, poring frowningly over columns of figures. "Yes," he said, looking up, "if my calculations are correct, Leila J. Pinckney wrote in all a matter of nine million and one hundred and forty thousand words of glutinous sentimentality at Honeysuckle Cottage, and it was a condition of her will that James should reside there for six months in every year. Failing to do this, he was to forfeit the five thousand pounds."

"It must be great fun making a freak will," I mused. "I often wish I was rich enough to do it."

"This was not a freak will. The conditions are perfectly understandable. James Rodman was a writer of sensational mystery stories, and his Aunt Leila had always disapproved of his work. She was a great believer in the influence of environment, and the reason why she inserted that clause in her will was that she

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wished to compel James to move from London to the country. She considered that living in London hardened him and made his outlook on life sordid. She often asked him if he thought it quite nice to harp so much on sudden death and blackmailers with squints. Surely, she said, there were enough squinting blackmailers in the world without writing about them.

"The fact that Literature meant such different things to these two had, I believe, caused something of a coolness between them, and James had never dreamed that he would be remembered in his aunt's will. For he had never concealed his opinion that Leila J. Pinckney's style of writing revolted him, however dear it might be to her enormous public. He held rigid views on the art of the novel, and always maintained that an artist with a true reverence for his craft should not descend to gooey love stories, but should stick austerely to revolvers, cries in the night, missing papers, mysterious Chinese and dead bodies—with or without gash in throat. First, last, and all the time, James Rodman had held the opinion—and voiced it fearlessly—that Leila J. Pinckney wrote bilge.

"It was a surprise to him, therefore, to find that he had been left this legacy. A pleasant surprise, of course. James was making quite a decent income out of the three novels and eighteen short stories which he produced annually, but an author can always find a use for five thousand pounds. And, as for the cottage, he had actually been looking about for a little place in the country at the very moment when he received the lawyer's letter. In less than a week he was installed at his new residence."

James' first impressions of Honeysuckle Cottage were, he tells me, wholly favorable. He was delighted with the place. It was a low, rambling, picturesque old house with funny little chimneys and a red roof, placed in the middle of the most charming country. With its oak beams, its trim garden, its trilling birds and its rose-hung porch, it was the ideal spot for a writer. It was just the sort of place, he reflected whimsically, which his aunt had loved to write about in her books. Even the apple-cheeked old housekeeper who attended to his needs might have stepped straight out of one of them.

It seemed to James that his lot had been cast in pleasant places. He had brought down his books, his pipes, and his golf clubs, and was hard at work finishing the best thing he had ever done. *The Secret Nine* was the title of it; and on the beautiful summer afternoon on which this story

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opens he was in the study, hammering away at his typewriter, at peace with the world. The machine was running sweetly, the new tobacco he had bought the day before was proving admirable, and he was moving on all cylinders to the end of a chapter.

He shoved in a fresh sheet of paper, chewed his pipe thoughtfully for a moment, then wrote rapidly:

For an instant Lester Gage thought that he must have been mistaken. Then the noise came again, faint but unmistakable—a soft scratching on the outer panel.

His mouth set in a grim line. Silently, like a panther, he made one quick step to the desk, noiselessly opened a drawer, drew out his automatic. After that affair of the poisoned needle, he was taking no chances. Still in dead silence, he tiptoed to the door; then, flinging it suddenly open, he stood there, his weapon poised.

On the mat stood the most beautiful girl he had ever beheld. A veritable child of Faerie. She eyed him for a moment with a saucy smile; then with a pretty, roguish look of reproof shook a dainty finger at him.

"I believe you've forgotten me, Mr. Gage!" she fluted with a mock severity which her eyes belied.

James stared at the paper dumbly. He was utterly perplexed. He had not the slightest intention of writing anything like this. To begin with, it was a rule with him, and one which he never broke, to allow no girls to appear in his stories. Sinister landladies, yes, and naturally any amount of adventuresses with foreign accents, but never under any pretext what may be broadly described as girls. A detective story, he maintained, should have no heroine. Heroines only held up the action and tried to flirt with the hero when he should have been busy looking for clues, and then went and let the villain kidnap them by some childishly simple trick. In his writing James was positively monastic.

And yet here was this creature with her saucy smile and her dainty forefinger horning in at the most important point in the story. It was uncanny.

He looked once more at his scenario. No, the scenario was all right.

In perfectly plain words it stated that what happened when the door opened was that a dying man fell in and after gasping, "The beetle! Tell Scotland Yard that the blue beetle is—" expired on the hearthrug, leaving Lester Gage not unnaturally somewhat

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mystified. Nothing whatever about any beautiful girls.

In a curious mood of irritation, James scratched out the offending passage, wrote in the necessary corrections, and put the cover on the machine. It was at this point that he heard William whining.

The only blot on this paradise which James had so far been able to discover was the infernal dog, William. Belonging nominally to the gardener, on the very first morning he had adopted James by acclamation, and he maddened and infuriated James. He had a habit of coming and whining under the window when James was at work. The latter would ignore this as long as he could; then, when the thing became insupportable, would bound out of his chair, to see the animal standing on the gravel, gazing expectantly up at him with a stone in his mouth. William had a weak-minded passion for chasing stones; and on the first day James, in a rash spirit of camaraderie, had flung one for him. Since then James had thrown no more stones; but he had thrown any number of other solids, and the garden was littered with objects ranging from match boxes to a plaster statuette of the young Joseph prophesying before Pharaoh. And still William came and whined, an optimist to the last.

The whining, coming now at a moment when he felt irritable and unsettled, acted on James much as the scratching on the door had acted on Lester Gage. Silently, like a panther, he made one quick step to the mantelpiece, removed from it a china mug bearing the legend A Present From Clacton-on-Sea, and crept to the window.

And as he did so a voice outside said, "Go away, sir, go away!" and there followed a short, high-pitched bark which was certainly not William's. William was a mixture of Airedale, setter, bull terrier, and mastiff; and when in vocal mood, favored the mastiff side of his family.

James peered out. There on the porch stood a girl in blue. She held in her arms a small fluffy white dog, and she was endeavoring to foil the upward movement toward this of the blackguard William. William's mentality had been arrested some years before at the point where he imagined that everything in the world had been created for him to eat. A bone, a boot, a steak, the back wheel of a bicycle—it was all one to William. If it was there he tried to eat it. He had even made a plucky attempt to devour the remains of the young Joseph prophesying before Pharaoh. And it was perfectly plain now that he regarded the curious wriggling object in the girl's arms purely in the light of a snack to keep

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body and soul together till dinner-time.

"William!" bellowed James.

William looked courteously over his shoulder with eyes that beamed with the pure light of a life's devotion, wagged the whip-like tail which he had inherited from his bull-terrier ancestor and resumed his intent scrutiny of the fluffy dog.

"Oh, please!" cried the girl. "This great rough dog is frightening poor Toto."

The man of letters and the man of action do not always go hand in hand, but practice had made James perfect in handling with a swift efficiency any situation that involved William. A moment later that canine moron, having received the present from Clacton in the short ribs, was scuttling around the corner of the house, and James had jumped through the window and was facing the girl.

She was an extraordinarily pretty girl. Very sweet and fragile she looked as she stood there under the honeysuckle with the breeze ruffling a tendril of golden hair that strayed from beneath her coquettish little hat. Her eyes were very big and very blue, her rose-tinted face becomingly flushed. All wasted on James, though. He disliked all girls, and particularly the sweet, droopy type.

"Did you want to see somebody?" he asked, stiffly.

"Just the house," said the girl, "if it wouldn't be giving any trouble. I do so want to see the room where Miss Pinckney wrote her books. This is where Leila J. Pinckney used to live, isn't it?"

"Yes; I am her nephew. My name is James Rodman."

"Mine is Rose Maynard."

James led the way into the house, and she stopped with a cry of delight on the threshold of the morning room.

"Oh, how too perfect!" she cried. "So this was her study?"

"Yes."

"What a wonderful place it would be for you to think in if you were a writer, too."

James held no high opinion of women's literary taste, but nevertheless he was conscious of an unpleasant shock.

"I am a writer," he said coldly. "I write detective stories."

"I—I'm afraid"—she blushed—"I'm afraid I don't often read detective stories."

"You no doubt prefer," said James, still more coldly, "the sort of thing my aunt used to write."

"Oh, I love her stories!" cried the girl, clasping her hands ecstatically. "Don't you?"

"I cannot say that I do."

"What?"

"They are pure apple sauce," said James, sternly; "just nasty

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blobs of sentimentality, thoroughly untrue to life."

The girl stared.

"Why, that's just what's so wonderful about them, their trueness to life! You feel they might all have happened. I don't understand what you mean."

They were walking down the garden now. James held the gate open for her and she passed through into the road.

"Well, for one thing," he said, "I decline to believe that a marriage between two young people is invariably preceded by some violent and sensational experience in which they both share."

"Are you thinking of *Scent o' the Blossom,* where Edgar saves Maud from drowning?"

"I am thinking of every single one of my aunt's books." He looked at her curiously. He had just got the solution of a mystery which had been puzzling him for some time. Almost from the moment he had set eyes on her she had seemed somehow strangely familiar. It now suddenly came to him why it was that he disliked her so much. "Do you know," he said, "you might be one of my aunt's heroines yourself? You're just the sort of girl she used to love to write about."

Her face lit up.

"Oh, do you really think so?" She hesitated. "Do you know what I have been feeling ever since I came here? I've been feeling that you are exactly like one of Miss Pinckney's heroes."

"No, I say, really!" said James, revolted.

"Oh, but you are! When you jumped through that window it gave me quite a start. You were so exactly like Claude Masterson in *Heather o' the Hills.*"

"I have not read *Heather o' the Hills,*" said James, with a shudder.

"He was very strong and quiet, with deep, dark, sad eyes."

James did not explain that his eyes were sad because her society gave him a pain in the neck. He merely laughed scornfully.

"So now, I suppose," he said, "a car will come and knock you down and I shall carry you gently into the house and— Look out!" he cried.

It was too late. She was lying in a little huddled heap at his feet. Around the corner a large automobile had come bowling, keeping with an almost affected precision to the wrong side of the road. It was now receding into the distance, the occupant of the tonneau, a stout red-faced gentleman in a fur coat, leaning out over the back. He had bared his head—not, one fears, as a pretty gesture of respect and regret, but because he was using his hat to hide the number plate.

The dog Toto was unfortunately uninjured.

James carried the girl gently

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into the house and put her down on the sofa in the morning-room. He rang the bell and the apple-cheeked housekeeper appeared.

"Send for the doctor," said James. "There has been an accident."

The housekeeper bent over the girl.

"Eh, dearie, dearie!" she said. "Bless her sweet pretty face!"

The gardner, he who technically owned William, was routed out from among the young lettuces and told to fetch Doctor Brady. He separated his bicycle from William, who was making a light meal off the left pedal, and departed on his mission. Doctor Brady arrived and in due course he made his report.

"No bones broken, but a number of nasty bruises. And, of course, the shock. She will have to stay here for some time, Rodman. Can't be moved."

"Stay here! But she can't! It isn't proper."

"Your housekeeper will act as a chaperon."

The doctor sighed. He was a stolid-looking man of middle age with side whiskers.

"A beautiful girl, that, Rodman," he said.

"I suppose so," said James.

"A sweet, beautiful girl. An elfin child."

"A what?" cried James, starting.

This imagery was very foreign to Doctor Brady as he knew him. On the only previous occasion on which they had had any extended conversation, the doctor had talked exclusively about the effect of too much protein on the gastric juices.

"An elfin child; a tender, fairy creature. When I was looking at her just now, Rodman, I nearly broke down. Her little hand lay on the coverlet like some white lily floating on the surface of a still pool, and her dear, trusting eyes gazed up at me."

He pottered off down the garden, still babbling, and James stood staring after him blankly. And slowly, like some cloud athwart a summer sky, there crept over James's heart the chill shadow of a nameless fear.

It was about a week later that Mr. Andrew McKinnon, the senior partner in the well-known firm of literary agents, McKinnon & Gooch, sat in his office in Chancery Lane, frowning thoughtfully over a telegram. He rang the bell.

"Ask Mr. Gooch to step in here." He resumed his study of the telegram. "Oh, Gooch," he said when his partner appeared, "I've just had a curious wire from young Rodman. He seems to want to see me very urgently."

Mr. Gooch read the telegram.

"Written under the influence of some strong mental excitement," he agreed. "I wonder why

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he doesn't come to the office if he wants to see you so badly."

"He's working very hard, finishing that novel for Prodder & Wiggs. Can't leave it, I suppose. Well, it's a nice day. If you will look after things here I think I'll motor down and let him give me lunch."

As Mr. McKinnon's car reached the crossroads a mile from Honeysuckle Cottage, he was aware of a gesticulating figure by the hedge. He stopped the car.

"Morning, Rodman."

"Thank God, you've come!" said James. It seemed to Mr. McKinnon that the young man looked paler and thinner. "Would you mind walking the rest of the way? There's something I want to speak to you about."

Mr. McKinnon alighted; and James, as he glanced at him, felt cheered and encouraged by the sight of the man. The literary agent was a grim, hard-bitten person, to whom, when he called at their offices to arrange terms, editors kept their faces turned so that they might at least retain their back collar studs. There was no sentiment in Andrew McKinnon. Editresses of society papers practiced their blandishments on him in vain, and many a publisher had waked screaming in the night, dreaming that he was signing a McKinnon contract.

"Well, Rodman," he said, "Prodder & Wiggs have agreed to our terms. I was writing to tell you so when your wire arrived. I had a lot of trouble with them, but it's fixed at twenty per cent., rising to twenty-five, and two hundred pounds advance royalties on day of publication."

"Good!" said James, absently. "Good! McKinnon, do you remember my aunt, Leila J. Pinckney?"

"Remember her? Why, I was her agent all her life."

"Of course. Then you know the sort of tripe she wrote."

"No author," said Mr. McKinnon, reprovingly, "who pulls down a steady twenty thousand pounds a year writes tripe."

"Well, anyway, you know her stuff."

"Who better?"

"When she died she left me five thousand pounds and her house, Honeysuckle Cottage. I'm living there now. McKinnon, do you believe in haunted houses?"

"No."

"Yet I tell you solemnly that Honeysuckle Cottage is haunted!"

"By your aunt?" said Mr. McKinnon, surprised.

"By her influence. There's a maglignant spell over the place; a sort of miasma of sentimentalism. Every body who enters it succumbs."

"Tut-tut! You mustn't have these fancies."

"They aren't fancies."

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"You aren't seriously meaning to tell me—"

"Well, how do you account for this? That book you were speaking about, which Prodder & Wiggs are to publish—*The Secret Nine*. Every time I sit down to write it a girl keeps trying to sneak in."

"Into the room?"

"Into the story."

"You don't want a love interest in your sort of book," said Mr. McKinnon, shaking his head. "It delays action."

"I know it does. And every day I have to keep shooing this infernal female out. An awful girl, McKinnon. A soppy, soupy, treacly, drooping girl with a roguish smile. This morning she tried to butt in on the scene where Lester Gage is trapped in the den of the mysterious opium peddler."

"No!"

"She did, I assure you. I had to rewrite three pages before I could get her out of it. And that's not the worst. Do you know, McKinnon, that at this moment I am actually living the plot of a typical Leila J. Pinckney novel in just the setting she always used! And I can see the happy ending coming nearer every day! A week ago a girl was knocked down by a car at my door and I've had to put her up, and every day I realize more clearly that sooner or later I shall ask her to marry me."

"Don't do it," said Mr. McKinnon, a stout bachelor. "You're too young to marry."

"So was Methuselah," said James, a stouter. "But all the same I know I'm going to do it. It's the influence of this awful house weighing upon me. I feel like an eggshell in a maelstrom. I am being sucked on by a force too strong for me to resist. This morning I found myself kissing her dog!"

"No!"

"I did! And I loathe the little beast. Yesterday I got up at dawn and plucked a nosegay of flowers for her, wet with the dew."

"Rodman!"

"It's a fact. I laid them at her door and went downstairs kicking myself all the way. And there in the hall was the apple-cheeked housekeeper regarding me archly. If she didn't murmur 'Bless their sweet young hearts!' my ears deceived me."

"Why don't you pack up and leave?"

"If I do I lose the five thousand pounds."

"Ah!" said Mr. McKinnon.

"I can understand what has happened. It's the same with all haunted houses. My aunt's subliminal ether vibrations have woven themselves into the texture of the place, creating at atmosphere which forces the ego of all who come in contact with it to attune themselves to it. It's either

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that or something to do with the fourth dimension."

Mr. McKinnon laughed scornfully.

"Tut-tut!" he said again. "This is pure imagination. What has happened is that you've been working too hard. You'll see this precious atmosphere of yours will have no effect on me."

"That's exactly why I asked you to come down. I hoped you might break the spell."

"I will that," said Mr. McKinnon, jovially.

The fact that the literary agent spoke little at lunch caused James no apprehension. Mr. McKinnon was ever a silent trencherman. From time to time James caught him stealing a glance at the girl, who was well enough to come down to meals now, limping pathetically; but he could read nothing in his face. And yet the mere look of his face was a consolation. It was so solid, so matter of fact, so exactly like an unemotional coconut.

"You've done me good," said James with a sigh of relief, as he escorted the agent down the garden to his car after lunch. "I felt all along that I could rely on your rugged common sense. The whole atmosphere of the place seems different now."

Mr. McKinnon did not speak for a moment. He seemed to be plunged in thought.

"Rodman," he said, as he got into his car, "I've been thinking over that suggestion of yours of putting a love interest into *The Secret Nine*. I think you're wise. The story needs it. After all, what is there greater in the world than love? Love—love—aye, it's the sweetest word in the language. Put in a heroine and let her marry Lester Gage."

"If," said James, grimly, "she does succeed in worming her way in she'll jolly well marry the mysterious opium peddler. But look here, I don't understand—"

"It was seeing that girl that changed me," proceeded Mr. McKinnon. And as James stared at him aghast, tears suddenly filled his hard-boiled eyes. He openly snuffled. "Aye, seeing her sitting there under the roses, with all that smell of honeysuckle and all. And the birdies singing so sweet in the garden and the sun lighting up her bonny face. The puir wee lass!", he muttered, dabbing at his eyes. "The puir bonny wee lass! Rodman," he said, his voice quivering, "I've decided that we're being hard on Prodder & Wiggs. Wiggs has had sickness in his home lately. We mustn't be hard on a man who's had sickness in his home, hey laddies? No, no! I'm going to take back that contract and alter it to a flat twelve per cent. and no advance royalties."

"What!"

"But you shan't lose by it, Rod-

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man. No, no, you shan't lose by it, my manny. I am going to waive my commission. The puir bonny wee lass!"

The car rolled off down the road. Mr. McKinnon, seated in the back, was blowing his nose violently.

"This is the end!" said James.

It is necessary at this point to pause and examine James Rodman's position with an unbiased eye. The average man, unless he puts himself in James' place, will be unable to appreciate it. James, he will feel, was making a lot of fuss about nothing. Here he was, drawing daily closer and closer to a charming girl with big blue eyes, and surely rather to be envied than pitied.

But we must remember that James was one of Nature's bachelors. And no ordinary man, looking forward dreamily to a little home of his own with a loving wife putting out his slippers and changing the gramophone records, can realize the intensity of the instinct for self-preservation which animates Nature's bachelors in times of peril.

James Rodman had a congenital horror of matrimony. Though a young man, he had allowed himself to develop a great many habits which were as the breath of life to him; and these habits, he knew instinctively, a wife would shoot to pieces within a week of the end of the honeymoon.

James liked to breakfast in bed; and, having breakfasted, to smoke in bed and knock the ashes out on the carpet. What wife would tolerate this practice?

James liked to pass his days in a tennis shirt, grey flannel trousers and slippers. What wife ever rests until she has inclosed her husband in a stiff collar, tight boots, and a morning suit and taken him with her to *thes musicales?*

These and a thousand other thoughts of the same kind flashed through the unfortunate young man's mind as the days went by, and every day that passed seemed to draw him nearer to the brink of the chasm. Fate appeared to be taking a malicious pleasure in making things as difficult for him as possible. Now that the girl was well enough to leave her bed, she spent her time sitting in a chair on the sun-sprinkled porch, and James had to read to her—and poetry, at that; and not the jolly, wholesome sort of poetry the boys are turning out nowadays, either —good, honest stuff about sin and gas works and decaying corpses—but the old-fashioned kind with rhymes in it, dealing almost exclusively with love. The weather, moreover, continued superb. The honeysuckle cast its sweet scent on the gentle breeze; the roses over the porch stirred and nodded; the flowers in the garden

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were lovelier than ever; the birds sang their little throats sore. And every evening there was a magnificent sunset. It was almost as if Nature was doing it on purpose.

At last James intercepted Doctor Brady as he was leaving after one of his visits and put the thing to him squarely:

"When is that girl going?"

The doctor patted him on the arm.

"Not yet, Rodman," he said in a low, understanding voice. "No need to worry yourself about that. Mustn't be moved for days and days and days—I might almost say weeks and weeks and weeks."

"Weeks and weeks!" cried James.

"And weeks," said Doctor Brady. He prodded James roguishly in the abdomen. "Good luck to you, my boy, good luck to you," he said.

It was some small consolation to James that the mushy physician immediately afterward tripped over William on his way down the path and broke his stethoscope. When a man is up against it like James, every little bit helps.

He was walking dismally back to the house after this conversation when he was met by the apple-cheeked housekeeper.

"The little lady would like to speak to you sir," said the apple-cheeked exhibit, rubbing her hands.

"Would she?" said James, hollowly.

"So sweet and pretty she looks, sir—or, sir, you wouldn't believe! Like a blessed angel sitting there with her dear eyes all a-shining."

"Don't do it!" cried James with extraordinary vehemence. "Don't do it!"

He found the girl propped up on the cushions and thought once again how singularly he disliked her. And yet, even as he thought this, some force against which he had to fight madly was whispering to him, "Go to her and take that little hand! Breathe into that little ear the burning words that will make that little face turn away crimsoned with blushes!" He wiped a bead of perspiraton from his forehead and sat down.

"Mrs. Stick-in-the-Mud—what's her name?—says you want to see me."

The girl nodded.

"I've had a letter from Uncle Henry. I wrote to him as soon as I was better and told him what had happened, and he is coming here tomorrow morning."

"Uncle Henry?"

"That's what I call him, but he's really no relation. He is my guardian. He and daddy were officers in the same regiment, and when daddy was killed, fighting on the Afghan frontier, he died in Uncle Henry's arms and with his last breath begged him to take care of me."

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James started. A sudden wild hope had waked in his heart. Years ago, he remembered, he had read a book of his aunt's entitled *Rupert's Legacy*, and in that book—

"I'm engaged to marry him," said the girl, quietly.

"Wow!" shouted James.

"What?" asked the girl, startled.

"Touch of cramp," said James. He was thrilling all over. The wild hope had been realized.

"It was daddy's dying wish that we should marry," said the girl.

"And dashed sensible of him, too; dashed sensible," said James, warmly.

"And yet," she went on, a little wistfully, "I sometimes wonder—"

"Don't!" said James. "Don't! You must respect daddy's dying wish. There's nothing like daddy's dying wish; you can't beat it. So he's coming here tomorrow, is he? Capital, capital! To lunch, I suppose? Excellent! I'll run down and tell Mrs. Who-Is-It to lay in another chop."

It was with a gay and uplifted heart that James strolled the garden and smoked his pipe next morning. A great cloud seemed to have rolled itself away from him. Everything was for the best in the best of all possible worlds. He had finished *The Secret Nine* and shipped it off to Mr. McKinnon, and now as he strolled there was shaping in his mind a corking plot about a man with only half a face who lived in a secret den and terrorized London with a series of shocking murders. And what made them so shocking was the fact that each of the victims, when discovered, was found to have only half a face, too. The rest had been chipped off, presumably by some blunt instrument.

The thing was coming out magnificently, when suddenly his attention was diverted to a piercing scream. Out of the bushes fringing the river that ran beside the garden burst the apple-cheeked housekeeper.

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir! Oh, sir!"

"What is it?" demanded James, irritably.

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir! Oh, sir!"

"Yes, and then what?"

"The little dog, sir! He's in the river!"

"Well, whistle him to come out."

"Oh, sir, do come quick! He'll be drowned!"

James followed her through the bushes, taking off his coat as he went. He was saying to himself, "I will not rescue this dog. I do not like the dog. It is high time he had a bath, and in any case it would be much simpler to stand on the bank and fish for him with a rake. Only an ass out of a Leila J. Pinckney book would dive into a beastly river to save—"

At this point he dived. Toto,

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alarmed by the splash, swam rapidly for the bank, but James was too quick for him. Grasping him firmly by the neck, he scrambled ashore and ran for the house, followed by the housekeeper.

The girl was seated on the porch. Over her there bent the tall soldierly figure of a man with keen eyes and graying hair. The housekeeper raced up.

"Oh, miss! Toto! In the river! He saved him! He plunged in and saved him!"

The girl drew a quick breath.

"Gallant, damme By Jove! By gad! Yes, gallant, by George!" exclaimed the soldierly man.

The girl seemed to wake from a reverie.

"Uncle Henry, this is Mr. Rodman. Mr. Rodman, my guardian, Colonel Carteret."

"Proud to meet you, sir," said the colonel, his honest blue eyes glowing as he fingered his short crisp mustache. "As fine a thing as I ever heard of, damme!"

"Yes, you are brave—brave," the girl whispered.

"I am wet—wet," said James, and went upstairs to change his clothes.

When he came down for lunch, he found to his relief that the girl had decided not to join them, and Colonel Carteret was silent and preoccupied. James, exerting himself in his capacity of host, tried him with the weather, golf, India, the Government, the high cost of living, first-class cricket, the modern dance craze, and murderers he had met, but the other still preserved that strange, absent-minded silence. It was only when the meal was concluded and James had produced cigarettes that he came abruptly out of his trance.

"Rodman," he said, "I should like to speak to you."

"Yes?" said James, thinking it was about time.

"Rodman," said Colonet Carteret, "or rather, George—I may call you George?" he added, with a sort of wistful diffidence that had a singular charm.

"Certainly," replied James, "if you wish it. Though my name is James."

"James, eh? Well, well, it amounts to the same thing, eh, what, damme, by gad?" said the colonel with a momentary return of his bluff soldierly manner. "Well, then, James, I have something that I wish to say to you. Did Miss Maynard—did Rose happen to tell you anything about myself in—er—in connection with herself?"

"She mentioned that you and she were engaged to be married."

The colonel's tightly drawn lips quivered.

"No longer," he said.

"What?"

"No, John, my boy."

"James."

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"No, James, my boy, no longer. While you were upstairs changing your clothes she told me—breaking down, poor child, as she spoke—that she wished our engagement to be at an end."

James half rose from the table, his cheeks blanched.

"You don't mean that!" he gasped.

Colonel Carteret nodded. He was staring out of the window, his fine eyes set in a look of pain.

"But this is nonsense!" cried James. "This is absurd! She—she mustn't be allowed to chop and change like this. I mean to say, it—it isn't fair—"

"Don't think of me, my boy."

"I'm not—I mean, did she give any reason?"

"Her eyes did."

"Her eyes did?"

"Her eyes, when she looked at you on the porch, as you stood there—young, heroic—having just saved the life of the dog she loves. It is you who have won that tender heart, my boy."

"Now, listen," protested James, "you aren't going to sit there and tell me that a girl falls in love with a man just because he saves her dog from drowning?"

"Why, surely," said Colonel Carteret, surprised. "What better reason could she have?" He sighed. "It is the old, old story, my boy. Youth to youth. I am an old man. I should have known—I should have foreseen—yes, youth to youth."

"You aren't a bit old."

"Yes, yes."

"No, no."

"Yes, yes."

"Don't keep on saying 'yes, yes'!" cried James, clutching at his hair. "Besides, she wants a steady old buffer—a steady, sensible man of medium age—to look after her."

Colonel Carteret shook his head with a gentle smile.

"This is mere quixotry, my boy. It is splendid of you to take this attitude; but no, no."

"Yes, yes."

"No, no." He gripped James' hand for an instant, then rose and walked to the door. "That is all I wished to say, Tom."

"James."

"James. I just thought that you ought to know how matters stood. Go to her, my boy, go to her, and don't let any thought of an old man's broken dream keep you from pouring out what is in your heart. I am an old soldier, lad, an old soldier. I have learned to take the rough with the smooth. But I think—I think I will leave you now. I—I should—should like to be alone for a while. If you need me you will find me in the raspberry bushes."

He had scarcely gone when James also left the room. He took his hat and stick and walked blindly out of the garden, he knew not wither. His brain was

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numbed. Then, as his powers of reasoning returned, he told himself that he should have foreseen this ghastly thing. If there was one type of character over which Leila J. Pinckney had been wont to spread herself, it was the pathetic guardian who loves his ward but relinquishes her to the younger man. No wonder the girl had broken off the engagement. Any elderly guardian who allowed himself to come within a mile of Honeysuckle Cottage was simply asking for it. And then, as he turned to walk back, a sort of dull defiance gripped James. Why, he asked, should he be put upon in this manner? If the girl liked to throw over this man, why should he be the goat?

He saw his way clearly now. He just wouldn't do it, that was all. And if they didn't like it they could lump it.

Full of a new fortitude, he strode in at the gate. A tall, soldierly figure emerged from the raspberry bushes and came to meet him.

"Well?" said Colonel Carteret.

"Well?" said James, defiantly.

"Am I to congratulate you?"

James caught his keen blue eye and hesitated. It was not going to be so simple as he had supposed.

"Well—er—" he said.

Into the keen blue eyes there came a look that James had not seen there before. It was the stern, hard look which—probably—had caused men to bestow upon this old soldier the name of Cold-Steel Carteret.

"You have not asked Rose to marry you?"

"Er—no; not yet."

The keen blue eyes grew keener and bluer.

"Rodman," said Colonel Carteret in a strange, queer voice, "I have known that little girl since she was a tiny child. For years she has been all in all to me. Her father died in my arms and with his last breath bade me see that no harm came to his darling. I have nursed her through mumps, measles—aye, and chicken pox—and I live but for her happiness." He paused, with a significance that made James' toes curl. "Rodman," he said, "do you know what I would do to any man who trifled with that little girl's affections?" He reached in his hip pocket and an ugly-looking revolver glittered in the sunlight. "I would shoot him like a dog."

"Like a dog?" faltered James.

"Like a dog," said Colonel Carteret. He took James' arm and turned him toward the house. "She is on the porch. Go to her. And if—" He broke off. "But tut!" he said in kindlier tone. "I am doing you an injustice, my boy. I know it."

"Oh, you are," said James, fervently.

"Your heart is in the right place."

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"Oh, absolutely," said James.

"Then go to her, my boy. Later on you may have something to tell me. You will find me in the strawberry beds."

It was very cool and fragrant on the porch. Overhead, little breezes played and laughed among the roses. Somewhere in the distance sheep bells tinkled, and in the shrubbery a thrush was singing its even-song.

Seated in her chair behind a wicker table laden with tea things, Rose Maynard watched James as he shambled up the path.

"Tea's ready," she called, gaily. "Where is Uncle Henry?" A look of pity and distress flitted for a moment over her flower-like face. "Oh, I—I forgot," she whispered.

"He is in the strawberry beds," said James in a low voice.

She nodded unhappily.

"Of course, of course. Oh, why is life like this?" James heard her whisper.

He sat down. He looked at the girl. She was leaning back with closed eyes, and he thought he had never seen such a little squirt in his life. The idea of passing his remaining days in her society revolted him. He was stoutly opposed to the idea of marrying anyone; but if, as happened to the best of us, he ever were compelled to perform the wedding glide, he had always hoped it would be with some lady golf champion who would help him with his putting, and thus, by bringing his handicap down a notch or two, enable him to save something from the wreck, so to speak. But to link his lot with a girl who read his aunt's books and liked them; a girl who could tolerate the presence of the dog Toto; a girl who clasped her hands in pretty, childish joy when she saw a nasturtium in bloom— it was too much. Nevertheless, he took her hand and began to speak.

"Miss Maynard—Rose—"

She opened her eyes and cast them down. A flush had come into her cheeks. The dog Toto at her side sat up and begged for cake, disregarded.

"Let me tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a lonely man who lived in a cottage all by himself—"

He stopped. Was it James Rodman who was talking this bilge?

"Yes?" whispered the girl.

"—but one day there came to him out of nowhere a little fairy princess. She—"

He stopped again, but this time not because of the sheer shame of listening to his own voice. What caused him to interrupt his tale was the fact that at this moment the tea table suddenly began to rise slowly in the air, tilting as it did so a considerable quantity of hot tea onto the knees of his trousers.

"Ouch!" cried James, leaping.

The table continued to rise, and

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then fell sideways, revealing the homely countenance of William, who, concealed by the cloth, had been taking a nap beneath it. He moved slowly forward, his eyes on Toto. For many a long day William had been desirous of putting to the test, once and for all, the problem of whether Toto was edible or not. Sometimes he thought yes, at other times no. Now seemed an admirable opportunity for a definite decision. He advanced on the object of his experiment, making a low whistling noise through his nostrils, not unlike a boiling kettle. And Toto, after one long look of incredulous horror, tucked his shapely tail between his legs and turning, raced for safety. He had laid a course in a bee line for the open garden gate, and William, shaking a dish of marmalade off his head a little petulantly, galloped ponderously after him. Rose Maynard staggered to her feet.

"Oh, save him!" she cried.

Without a word James added himself to the procession. His interest in Toto was but tepid. What he wanted was to get near enough to William to discuss with him that matter of the tea on his trousers. He reached the road and found that the order of the runners had not changed. For so small a dog, Toto was moving magnificently. A cloud of dust rose as he skidded around the corner. William followed. James followed William.

And so they passed Farmer Birkett's barn, Farmer Giles' cow shed, the place where Farmer Willetts' pigsty used to be before the big fire, and the Bunch of Grapes public house, Jno. Biggs propr., licensed to sell tobacco, wines, and spirits. And it was as they were turning down the lane that leads past Farmer Robinson's chicken run that Toto, thinking swiftly, bolted abruptly into a small drain pipe.

"William!" roared James, coming up at a canter. He stopped to pluck a branch from the hedge and swooped darkly on.

William had been crouching before the pipe, making a noise like a bassoon into its interior; but now he rose and came beaming to James. His eyes were aglow with chumminess and affection; and placing his forefeet on James' chest, he licked him three times on the face in rapid succession. And as he did so, something seemed to snap in James. The scales seemed to fall from James' eyes. For the first time he saw William as he really was, the authentic type of dog that saves his master from a frightful peril. A wave of emotion swept over him.

"William!" he muttered. "William!"

William was making an early supper off a half brick he had

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found in the road. James stooped and patted him fondly.

"William," he whispered, "you knew when the time had come to change the conversation, didn't you, old boy!" He straightened himself. "Come, William," he said. "Another four miles and we reach Meadowsweet Junction. Make it snappy and we shall catch the up express, first stop London."

William looked up into his face and it seemed to James that he gave a brief nod of comprehension and approval. James turned. Through the trees to the east he could see the red roof of Honeysuckle Cottage, lurking like some evil dragon in ambush.

Then, together, man and dog passed silently into the sunset.

That (concluded Mr. Mulliner) is the story of my distant cousin James Rodman. As to whether it is true, that, of course, is an open question. I, personally, am of opinion that it is. There is no doubt that James did go to live at Honeysuckle Cottage and, while there, underwent some experience which has left an ineradicable mark upon him. His eyes today have that unmistakable look which is to be seen only in the eyes of confirmed bachelors whose feet have been dragged to the very brink of the pit.

And, if further proof be needed, there is William. He is now James' inseparable companion. Would any man be habitually seen in public with a dog like William unless he had some solid cause to be grateful to him—unless they were linked together by some deep and imperishable memory? I think not. Myself, when I observe William coming along the street, I cross the road and look into a shop window till he has passed. I am not a snob, but I dare not risk my position in Society by seen talking to that curious compound.

And yet James walks daily with him in Piccadilly. It is surely magnificent.

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Judith Merril edits fine anthologies, but we do wish she could find more time for the writing of her own stories. . . . Here she turns her compassionate eye on the problems and inner conflicts of an adolescent boy who has lived his life on a star ship commanded by women.

Wish Upon A Star

by Judith Merril

I WISH, I WISH, I WISH . . .

Sheik sat under the shadow of a broad-leaf shrub, his head back, eyes closed against the glare from overhead, mouth open for a shout of protest he could never voice.

He stifled the thought with the sound, pushed it out of his head as he pushed his body backward, throwing his weight straight-armed on the flat palms of his hands behind him. Flexing his calves below bent knees, he pulled against the long thigh sinews and tightened the slanting muscles of his back, driving all tension from his mind into his body as he raised his buttocks up off the ground and hung suspended, arching from knees to elbows, hands and feet rooted to the soil. Wholly intent on the immediate physical effort, he stayed so till the blood rushing to his head choked in his throat, and arms and legs were trembling beyond control. Then with a last summoning of purpose, he flipped over and sprawled contentedly collapsed on chest and stomach, head turned so one cheek also rested on the resilient softness of the granular stuff that made the plant beds. With each great breath of air his nostrils sucked up the rich sweet damp aroma of the roots.

For a moment there was peace; and then, again, *I wish, I wish, I wish* . . .

Tears filled his eyes. He sat up angrily and brushed them off. He was too old for crying. Crying wouldn't help. He was too old to be sitting idle here, wasting time, wasting wishes on absurdities. Old enough not to be bothered by anything Naomi said or did . . . but not yet old enough (smart enough?) to know better than to try to tell her anything.

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She had listened so meekly, watched so quietly, while he repaired the rootpack she had broken, holding the torn parts—just *so*—together, tamping the soil down—just *so*—around the fiber, explaining as he worked why it was just *this* way. He let her silence fool him; well it was no one's fault but his own. He should have known better by now.

When he was finished she smiled, very sweetly. "It's so *comforting* to know you'll be here, Sheik," she said, "when *I'm* in charge. You're so *efficient.*" Then a quick glance at the chrono, which she must have been watching all the time from the corner of her eye, or she couldn't have timed it all so perfectly. "Oh-ooooh! I better run! I'm late for Sessions now . . ." And she was off, flashing a hand free of dirt or work, leaving him, trowel in hand, to realize he had just finished doing her job for her.

It wasn't fair. Naomi was twelve and a half, more than a year younger than he was. In Standard School she was behind him in almost everything; and never, never as long as she lived, would she be able to handle a plant, to feel it and *understand* it, as he did. But she was the one in Special Sessions classes now, learning the things he ought to know. They'd make her read all the books *he* wanted, whether she cared or not, and put her to learn in the lab, mastering all the mysteries and intricacies of advanced Bichem. While he, Toshiko, would go on day after day, trowel in hand, taking her gibes now, and later—much later, when he replaced Abdur in charge of the plantroom—taking her orders as Ab took his orders from Lieutenant Johnson.

It just wasn't *fair!*

I wish, I wish I was . . .

He stopped it, cut it off sharply. He was not going to think that way any more. *I wish Sarah was here,* he finished the thought instead. Tonight, maybe, she would ask him again. He had nursery duty, but if he told Bob . . . *if* she asked him, that was . . . well, if she did, he'd get off duty somehow . . .

Without even closing his eyes, he could see her there now, as she had been the night before last, spawled on the rootpacks beside him, her shining long legs golden under the ultras, her face in the shadow of the leafy shrub a deep dark brown, but somehow giving out that gold-glow too. Her eyes were closed and her hand, smooth and cool, soft and small, lay inside his as he watched her in warm and perfect comradeship.

For most of an hour, they had barely moved nor talked: just lay there together in the private shadow, sharing what had been his alone, thinking and dreaming silently but not separately at all.

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Nothing Naomi said or did ought to matter now, because things-as-they-were had given him this special thing, a place and a significance, to share with Sarah. Never before had he told anyone about the shadows—how he felt about them. (No one but Ab, of course, but that was different; Ab *knew*.) She had seen them, naturally, most every day of her life; everyone in the ship had. The nursery-age children spent at least an hour each day hullside, for ultra exposure and exercise as well as their basic Bichem. When they started with Standard School classwork, they were required to spend a half hour of playtime every day under the lamps. But it was the light they came for; the shadows belonged to Sheik.

When he was just old enough to be allowed to go about alone, he started coming down hullside every chance he had; the shadows drew him. Later, the plants became important too, and now he knew that they would be his work all his life. That was good in itself, but better because the shadows were part of the plants.

Nowhere else in the whole ship was there anything like it. Once in a while, the floorlight or one of the walls in the regular living and work rooms would go out of whack, and for a brief time the diffusion would be distorted and patches of dark-and-bright showed where people moved. But only here, where the thick root-packs lined the whole inner shell of the ship's hull, where there were only struts instead of walls, and the great ultra lamps glared day and night overhead, only here were there real *shadows*, under the plants, stationary, permanent, and shaped.

The ultras were never dimmed. They shone, Sheik thought, with the same brilliant fixity of time and purpose as the pinpointed stars on the black satin of the lounge viewplate. And in the center of this same clump of shrubbery where he lay now there was a hollow spot where some of the oldest, tallest plants grew so thick no light could penetrate, where it was dark, *black*, almost as black as the space between the stars: the way, he thought, a planet's night must be.

And this spot, where he had taken Sarah, was — depending where you held your head — a moonlit planet night, a 'twilight,' 'morning,' or 'afternoon' . . . all words in books, until they took on meaning here where the leaves and lights produced an infinitude of ever-changing shades and combinations of black, grey, green, brown, and gold.

He had never told anyone how he thought about that. Not Abdur; not even Sarah, yet. But if she asked him to take her here

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again, he thought, he could tell her; she would really understand.

He sat up sharply, the faint rustling sound like an answer to a prayer. *Sarah?*

Two plant stalks parted cautiously and a small, round, brown face stared into his own.

"What are *you* doing down here now?" Sheik demanded. How had the fool kid found him here?

"I *told* 'm I'd find you," Hari said triumphantly. "I *told* 'm I could. You better hurry. Ab's mad at you. He has to work onna mew-tay-shuns," the small boy said the new word carefully, "an' you're supposed to be our teacher this time."

Sheik scrambled to his feet. Nursery class here already? *That* late? He'd spent half the afternoon doing nothing, dreaming . . . Ab must be mad all right!

"You forgot about us," Hari said.

He hadn't forgotten; he had just forgotten time. "Come on, shrimpy," he told Harendra gruffly. "Better hop on if you want to get back *quick*." He squatted and Hari climbed on his shoulders—a rare and special treat; it would make up for his seeming to forget. He started for Abdur's workroom at a trot.

Harendra was three years old now, almost four, but he was Toshiko's favorite in the nursery still. He had been Sheik's first full-charge baby; sometimes he didn't seem too sure himself which one was his father, Abdur or Sheik. Certainly he didn't care; he loved them both with the same fierce intensity. And it upset him if Ab was angry with the Sheik.

Abdur had spending all his time the past few days, struggling to save a planting of mutant seedlings newly developed in the Bichem lab. It was a high-protein lentil with a new flavor, but some mysterious lack in rootpack nourishment — the kind of thing that showed up only in actual growth conditions — made it essential to nurse each plant with extra care while the lab techs tried to find the cause of the trouble.

The intricate patient skill with which Abdur tended the delicate young plants was fascinating to Sheik. And the young children, he thought, would be interested in the luminous unfamiliar yellow of the sickly leaves.

Abdur agreed with evident satisfaction to having the children visit the sick patch. He rebuked Sheik only briefly and without heat for his forgetfulness, and set out immediately for his plants, taking the way cross-ship, through the central living section, to reach the area on the other side of the hull without further delay. Toshiko took his troupe of six around by the hullside route, routinely replying to the inevitable routine questions at each step: why was this plant taller, the other stalk thick-

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er, a leaf a darker green or different shape. To most of the grown people on board, the endless rows of plants covering the whole inner surface of the ship's hull were monotonous and near-identical. Abdur knew better; so did Sheik; and the nursery kids noticed things sometimes that Toshiko hadn't seen himself.

But this time he didn't want to stop at every plant. It was a slow enough trip with their short legs, and he hurried them past spots where he might otherwise have tried to show them something new or slightly changed. Then Dee, silly dimpled shreiking Dena, who, at barely two, should not (in Sheik's opinion) have come into the nursery class as yet, sat herself down on the rootpacks and refused to budge.

Toshiko bent to pick her up. He'd carry her, rather than waste time coaxing now. But she pointed to one root, growing wrong, malformed and upended, and stopped progress completely by spilling out a spurt of only half-coherent but entirely fascinated inquiry.

Well, he had been wrong; she *was* old enough. Sheik sat down beside her and got to work, framing his answers to her questions carefully, trying to give her a new mystery each time to provoke the next useful question. He pulled packing away from around the upended root, dug down, and placed the root where it belonged, giving all the children a chance to see how the other roots lay in the pack before he covered it. He explained how the roots drank nourishment from the soil, and floundered attempting to explain the action of the untraviolet lamps.

All the while, Hari hung over his shoulder, watching; the boy had seen it all before, when Dina was too little to care, but he drank in every sight and every word as if it were the first time for him too.

"It's like being tucked in," he broke in suddenly, offering his own level of lucidity in place of Sheik's complications. "Like when your daddy tucks you in at night, and kisses you and you feel warm and good all over you and you grow in your sleep."

Dina's black eyes were shining with excitement. "I know," she said. "Every night when I sleep I grow." She lifted a hand to prove the point. "*Way* up!"

"Well, that's how it is," Hari nodded commendation to his pupil. "Only the lights don't have to go out for the plants to sleep, because they're asleep all the time. Underneath there. *That's* why they never go anyplace."

His voice lost some confidence at the end. He looked to Toshiko for approval, and Dina looked for confirmation.

Sheik hesitated, failed to find words for a more adequate ex-

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planation, and decided Hari had probably put across more than he could for right now. He nodded and smiled at them both. "Come on now, or we won't have time to see the new plants." They all ran after him.

Lieutenant Johnson was on duty at the children's supper that evening. She strolled casually from one of the four tables to another, listening to a scrap of conversation here, answering a question there, correcting a younger child somewhere else, reminding Fritzi —who at eleven had just become a table leader—to keep her group quieter.

At Sarah's table she paused only briefly; the officer on duty never had to stop there except for a greeting. Sarah and Sheik had seven in their group, more than anyone else, but they never had trouble. They were a good combination; Sheik glowed inwardly with his awareness of this, and with the feeling that the same thought was passing through Johnson's mind as she looked from one end of the table to the other. He didn't need any smiles from Johnson to keep him happy tonight, though. In the lounge, just before, Sarah *had* asked him. As soon as he could swap his evening duty, he was to meet her and take her down hullside again.

He caught her glance across the table as the Lieutenant walked away, and saw her wink at him. With astonishment he thought, *She's as happy as I am! She wants to go too!*

He knew, though he could not see as she bent over the carving, how her breasts had begun to swell under her shirt, and he knew by heart, though they were hidden behind the table, the long clean curves of those golden legs. Mechanically he added lentils to carrobeet top and passed a plate down, reminding Adolph Liebnitz that there was a fork at his place, and he should use it. He answered a question of Irma's without ever knowing what she asked, filled another plate, kept his eyes off Sarah, thinking, *This time . . . this time I'll . . .* Added a little extra greens to Justin's plate, skimping on the carrobeets the kid hated *. . . This time I'll . . .* Looked up, caught Sarah's eye again, felt himself going hot and red, and dropped the thought.

He was in a warm daze still when Lieutenant Johnson mounted the rostrum to conclude the meal with the evening prayer. Sheik chanted the familiar words of thanksgiving, suddenly meaningful, and looked directly at Sarah as they finished, saying to her and her alone, "Survive in Peace!"

The Lieutenant read off the cleanup assignments, and then, just as casually as if she were making a routine announcement instead of delivering a stomach

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punch, added: "There will be game-room play for Classes Three and Four till bedtime. Special Sessions girls are invited to attend a staff meeting in the wardroom immediately after senior supper."

Sarah threw him a look of mild disappointment. "Tomorrow?" she mouthed. He didn't answer, pretended not to see. Tomorrow? Sure. What difference did it make to *her?*

And then he was angry at himself. It wasn't Sarah's fault. And you couldn't blame her for being excited about a wardroom meeting. It had to be something *big* for the Sessions to get asked in to wardroom. He tried to meet her eye again, but everyone was getting up, people were moving; he caught a glimpse of her back, and then couldn't see her at all. Desultorily, he drifted with the other older children to the lounge, and stood staring at the big screen.

The sun was big now, filling one whole sixteenth sector. Maybe the meeting . . .? He couldn't get excited. There'd been too many false alarms when they began decelerating almost a year ago, rumors and counter rumors and waves of excitement about how the tapes were coming out of the calckers, how it was *the* planet . . . No, it was poisonous, ammonia atmosphere . . . No, it was just a barren sun . . . It was the right one after all; it had a perfect earth-type atmosphere, one-third the mass . . .

Meaningless words, after all, to those who had been born on board *Survival;* words out of books. The older people had been more excited than the kids. "Earth-type" *meant* something to them.

But that was a year ago; and every day since the sun had grown bigger on the plate, and no day had brought any real news, except somewhere along the way it had been confirmed officially that there *were* planets—type as yet unknown. Bob said he thought it would be four or five more months before they came in close enough to give the calckers anything to work on.

Last year, when they first began decelerating, Bob had talked a lot to Sheik, times when they were by themselves in quarters, the little ones napping or asleep for the night. It was the first time, really, since Toshiko's nursery years that he and his father had been close. From the time he was six, when he was assigned for training in the plant rooms, Abdur had grown to fill the role of father-advisor more and more. But when the bright sun started to grow faintly brighter on the viewscreen, Bob's excitement was uncontainable; he poured it out on his son, a boy incredibly grown to where, by the time a landing

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was likely to take place, he would be in effect one of the men.

And the men, Bob told him, would have to work together when that happened. Things on a planet would not be quite the same as on board ship. For weeks, Bob reminisced and daydreamed, talking abouth Earth and its homes and families and governments, about the launching of the ship, *Survival*, and how and why things were set up on board ship as they were.

Some of it Sheik had heard in class; other parts he was cautioned to forget except in private. Everyone knew that the *Survival* was Earth's first star ship, a colonizing expedition sent to find a planet—*if* there was one—suitable for the spillover of the home world's crowded billions. Everyone knew the voyage might take years or decades; the ship was completely self-contained; the ion drive made it possible to carry fuel enough for a hundred years. There were living quarters on either side of those now in use that had never been unlocked; if a third or fourth generation grew up on board ship, they'd be needed.

But if it took that long, it would do Earth no good. If the ship could not return with news of an established colony within fifty years, then it was under orders not to return at all, but to remain and start over altogether in the new place.

This much was common knowledge, and one further fact: that the original crew of twenty-four had included twenty women and four men for obvious biological race-survival reasons.

What they didn't tell in classes was why all of the men were subordinates, none of them trained for astrogation, electronics, communications, or any of the skilled jobs of ship control; why all the officers were women. The children took it for granted as they grew; the ship was the way things were and always had been; the readers that spoke of families and pets and churches, towns and villages and lakes and oceans, aircraft and weather, were fascinating, and in a quaint way, true no doubt; but reality was the ship with its four family units, domestic fathers, energetic women, school dorms, communal meals.

Bob's talk of men who "ran their own families" and ruled their homes, of male supremacy in the environment of a hostile world, of wives and husbands cleaving one to one faithfully, first intrigued Sheik, then excited him, while he regarded it as fairy-tale stuff. But when his father pointed out one day that there were just as many boys as girls among the children—a fact Toshiko somehow had not thought about before—everything the old man said

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struck home in a new way.

"Then *why* did they put the women in charge of everything?" he demanded for the first time.

Bob's answer was incoherent, angry and fantasizing. Later Toshiko took his puzzlement to Ab, who explained, tight-lipped, that women were considered better suited to manage the psychological problems of an ingrown group, and to maintain with patience over many many years, if needed, the functioning and purpose of the trip.

"Then when we land . . .?"

"*When* we land, there will be time enough to think about it! Who's been talking to you about all this?"

"Well, I was asking Bob," Sheik said cautiously. "But . . ."

"But nothing," Abdur said sharply. "If you're smart, Sheik, you'll forget it now. If anyone else hears this kind of talk from you, your father will be in trouble. Or I will. Forget it."

And for the most part, he did. Bob never spoke of it again. And Ab spoke only as he always had, of sun and rain, forests and gardens, sunsets and hillsides and farmlands *outdoors* on a planet.

Sheik stared at the giant sun on the viewscreen; if they had found their planet, if they landed here, he was almost a man . . .

No. He *was* a man. He could do everything a man could do, and he was very strong, stronger than any of the girls. And Sarah, he thought, was very close to womanhood. She was the oldest of the girls; it would be natural. One man and one woman, Bob had said . . . the thought was exciting. There was no other woman he would want to have. Naomi or Fritzi or Beatrice, the other older girls, were *nasty*. As for the crew —Lieutenant Johnson, maybe, but —but when he thought of Sarah the idea of being at the call of four others besides was obscene somehow.

Sheik laughed abruptly, and turned and left the lounge. He had spent enough time today dreaming fantasies. There was work to do.

Still, when the last of the little ones was tucked in bed, and the quarters were quiet, Toshiko found himself pacing restlessly in the tiny pantry-service room. He had his school books with him, and had meant to study for the morning's class. But when he tried to read, plant shadows and Sarah's legs and all the things Bob had said raced through his mind, blurring the print. He wished Bob would come back from wherever he was. The kids were asleep; there was only one hour till he himself had to be in dorm, and he was obsessed with the need to go hullside, to find his cool shadow-corner and lie there where peace was always to be found.

And obsessed, foolishly, with

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the idea that after the meeting Sarah might, just *might*, go down to look and see if he was there . . .

Bob didn't come. After a while Toshiko closed his book, wrote a quick note, "Hullside. Back in a minute," and went out.

He had never done such a thing before. He had broken rules, yes, but not when the children were in his care. But, really, what could happen? If one of them woke up, if anything went wrong, half an hour could not mean life or death. And . . .

And he didn't care. He *had* to go.

Quickly and quietly, exhilarated beyond previous experience by the sense of his guilt, he went down companionways towards the hull. He closed the last hatch behind him and stood on the top step looking down into the shadowed vastness of hullside. He was above the lamps. Beneath them was bright yellow light; then pale green, new leaves at the top of the plant stalks. Darker green below. Brownish-green stalks, some slender swaying things, some thick as his own arm. And underneath, the shadows. He started down, quietly still, but beginning already to feel more at ease.

Then he heard the voice. Bob's voice. Urgent, persuasive.

"I tell you it's *true*. This time it's true. I got it straight."

"Hell, Bob, every time they send in a tech to film something secret, you think that's *It*. You said the same thing six months ago, and how many times before that?" That was Sean, Sarah's father, who ran the livestock rooms.

"This time I know I'm right," Bob said quietly. His voice was convincing, even to Sheik.

"Well, if it is, what do you want us to do, Bob?" Abdur, this time, also quiet. The voices were coming, Sheik realized, from Abby's little private room near the seedbeds.

"Just that I think it should have been announced. I want to know what they're up to, with that meeting. Ab, have you ever stopped to think that maybe when the time came, *the women wouldn't want to land?*"

Silence, shocked silence; Sheik stood like a statue on his step.

"Come off it, man." Sean. "They're not *that* crazy."

"It's not so crazy, Sean," Abdur said thoughtfully, and then: "But I don't see what we could do about it if they didn't. *And* I don't think they'd hold back, even if they wanted to."

"You got a lot of trust in human nature, Ab."

"No-o-o-o. Well, yes. I guess I do. But that's not why. Listen, Robert, what do you think kept you from going off your nut those first five years?"

"What do you want me to say?" Bob asked bitterly. "God?"

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"Well, He may have helped. But that wasn't what I meant. You were in bad shape for a while. After Alice . . ."

"Watch yourself, Ab." Bob growled.

"Take it easy and listen a minute. After what happened—how come you didn't do the same thing?"

Sheik eased himself down to a sitting position on the top step, and listened.

A lot of it made no sense. Alice had been one of the women, of course; there were nineteen now. Funny he'd never thought of *that* before! She must have died when he was still a baby. Most of the kids wouldn't even know the name.

And Bob, Bob had had something to do with Alice. The conversational scraps and fragmentary references were incomplete, but Sheik had a picture, suddenly, of something that had happened to his father, of something like what was, maybe, happening with him and Sarah, and wasn't *supposed* to happen.

He tried to think how he would feel, what he would do, if Sarah suddenly—were no more. He could not imagine it. Nobody ever died. Nobody on the ship was more than forty-five. If Bob had felt that way, and then Alice died, he could see why his father was—*funny*, sometimes. Why he imagined things and made up stories about the time on Earth.

The twin revelation—the knowledge that what he thought and felt for Sarah had happened to *other* people, often; and the shocked glimpse of grief inside his father—almost obscured the more immediate importance of what the men said down there.

"Indoctrination," Ab was saying.

Alice was the only one who hadn't had it. She had been the ship's doctor; "they," the planners, had thought someone on board, the "stablest" one, should be free of "post-hypno." Words, some new, some old but out of context here. *Indoctrinated* . . . the women were indoctrinated too; they *couldn't* refuse to land the ship. Ab said so.

The others agreed with him. Bob didn't, at first, but after a while, though he kept arguing, Sheik knew even Bob was convinced.

Gradually, the voices turned more casual; the conversation slowed. Sheik thought it must be getting close to dorm curfew. He raised the hatch above him cautiously, hoisted himself up through it and let it down with silent care. He reached his own family quarters again without meeting anyone.

Inside, he put his note down the dispostll, checked on the sleeping children, and arranged him-

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self in the galley with a book on his lap, his feet on the counter, and a yawn of boredom on his face. When Bob returned, he hung around hopefully a little while, but Bob was not feeling talkative.

Sheik had a few minutes till curfew still; without planning it, he found himself in the nightlit empty lounge, at the big screen, watching the giant sun, almost imagining he could see it grow bigger and closer against the dead black of space, straining his eyes absurdly for the planet . . .

Planet!

The pieces began to come together.

Voices came down the corridor, and a far part of his mind remembered the wardroom meeting, Sarah, the evening's plans. Just coming out now? Maybe he could see her still. That was silly—curfew soon. Well, tomorrow . . . Just coming out *now*? That was some meeting . . .

Meeting! And Bob said he knew *for sure* this time the tapes on the planet were through: It was a good one. They could land on it, and live.

Live on a planet.

His stomach felt funny for a minute, and he thought that was foolish, what was there to be *afraid* of?

Live on a planet. He thought the words slowly and purposefully. Planet. Plants. Plants on a planet. On a planet, plants grew everywhere, by themselves, *naturally*. That's what Ab said. He said they grew all over, so you'd have to *tear them out* to make a place to build your house.

House. Family. Inside-outside. They were all words in the books. Hills, sunsets, animals. *Wild* animals. Danger. But now he wasn't afraid; he *liked* the thought. Wild animals, he thought again, savoring it. Houses, inside and outside; inside, the family; outside, the animals. And plants. The *sun*shine . . . daytime . . . and night . .

Shadows!

The light brightened around him. On a planet, there would be shadows all the time everywhere.

"Sheik . . ."

"Yes, Ma'am." He turned. The response was automatic . . . "indoctrinated?" . . . even before his mind reoriented.

The room was daylit again. Five of the women were standing just inside the door. Lieutenant Johnson was smiling, watching him.

"Better hop, boy. Curfew."

"Yes, Ma'am." He moved past the others. Johnson, closest to the doorway, reached out a hand and rumpled up his hair.

"Do your dreaming in bed, Sheik," she said tenderly, as if he were in the nursery still. But something was in her eyes that made him know she did not think he was a little boy. He felt better when he got outside.

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The girls' dorm was to the right; he could see the last of the senior class girls disappearing through the door. If he'd moved faster . . .

He turned to the left, walked up to the boys' dorm, and almost missed hearing the sharp whispered noise from the cross corridor beyond.

He looked back. No one in sight. Raced up the corridor, and she was *there,* waiting. Waiting for *him.*

"Sheik! Shhh . . . I just wanted to make sure . . . tomorrow night?"

"Sure," he said.

Her eyes were shining. Like the Lieutenant, she was looking at him *differently.* But it was a different kind of difference, and he liked it. Very much.

"Sure," he said again. "Tomorrow night for sure."

But neither one moved. A gong sounded softly. Curfew time.

"You better get back," she said. "I have a pass."

Even her whispering voice was different. She was vibrating with excitement. It was *true!*

"Okay," he said. "Listen, Sarah. Let's not wait. What about tonight?"

"*Tonight?*"

"After inspection."

"You mean . . .?"

"Sneak down. It's easy," he promised out of the practice of an hour ago, and lied. "I've done it lots of times."

"Who with?"

He smiled. From inside the lounge they heard voices. "Listen, I got to get back. Right now. I'll meet you in Cargo G in half an hour. Then I'll show you how."

"But Sheik . . ."

He didn't wait for her answer. He didn't dare. Johnson or one of the others would be out for inspection any minute now. He ran on his toes, silently, back down the corridor, tore off his clothes, jumped into bed, pulled covers up, and did not open his eyes even to peek and see what officer it was when she came in to inspect the row of beds. He just lay there, astonished at what he had said and what he was – beyond hesitation – going to do.

He thought of the times he had waited and wanted and hoped for Sarah to ask him, to notice him, to pick him to dance with or play with or for a work partner. Now, all of a sudden, he had thrown himself at her head, suggested . . .

He began to be horrified. It wasn't the idea of breaking curfew rules. Yesterday, even this afternoon, that would have shocked him, but now—knowing about the planet changed all *that.* What bothered him now was the brazenness of it: the way he had practically begged her to come, and hadn't even waited to find out . . .

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He wouldn't go. She'd never go. He was crazy to think . . .

She was laughing at him now.

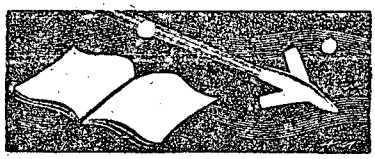
I wish, he thought miserably, *I wish I was . . .*

Only he didn't. He didn't envy girls any more.

He lay very quietly in bed for fifteen minutes. Then he got up and pulled on his shorts. He looked at the six other beds in the schoolboys' dorm. Joel, the youngest, was nine, still a kid. The others were twelve, thirteen, eleven, eleven, twelve. Five of them who would soon be men. Like Bob and Ab, Bomba and Sean, and Sheik himself. He left the dorm, slipped down the corridor, thinking as he went of the words he had read somewhere, that he "moved like a shadow."

I wish, he thought, and turned round a corner to safety, *I wish that she comes.* And then: *I wish that we land on a planet very soon.*

SOME OF OUR BEST FRIENDS . . . ARE



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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THEODORE STURGEON HAS SO FAR written, in the science-fantasy field, one interesting novel (THE DREAMING JEWELS, 1950, reprinted as THE SYNTHETIC MAN), one great novel (MORE THAN HUMAN, 1953), and now a . . . well, a curious short novel, THE COSMIC RAPE (Dell, 35¢).

As any one at all interested in s.f. must know by now, Sturgeon has been obsessed for years by a notion which has, in various stories, been called syzygy, synergy, symbiosis . . . anyway, the concept that the human individual is an incomplete part seeking the rest of its whole, and that 1 + 1 adds up to a great deal more than 2.

To me, this is a theme capable of expressing either profound human truth or paranoiac falsehood. Perhaps more importantly, it's a theme that can seem a mite tiresome the-*n*th time round, even from so gifted a writer as Sturgeon.

THE COSMIC RAPE, which is expanded from the recent *Galaxy* story *To Marry Medusa,* is such an ultimate expression of the syzygetic theme—dwarfing even the future race-minds conceived by Olaf Stapledon—that it's hard to see what the author can do for an encore . . . save turn to some other theme. This is hardly the best of Sturgeon's synergetic chronicles, but it is easily the vastest.

To such an extent, I must confess, that it loses me. I am not convinced by this immense hypersynthesis, nor persuaded that it solves all the small human problems that the story has carefully diagramed.

But if I am cool to this book, if I seem unable to relax and enjoy it, it is doubtless because I expect so much of the first Sturgeon novel in 5 years. Routine hacks seem to be able to turn out any solicited number of s.f. novels; but Sturgeon, like many others in the first rank, rarely writes at book length. This is particularly unfortunate since Sturgeon is not inherently a short-fantasy writer like Saki or Collier; he obviously is a novelist or at very least a novellaist at heart and moves with eager freedom in the full four (at least) dimensions of longer work—as you may observe in his new collection, A TOUCH OF STRANGE (Doubleday, $2.95).

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There are shorts here, and fine ones—the enchanting title story (F&SF, Jan., 1958) and the all-but-unprintable (in this now-and-then puritanical culture) *Affair with a Green Monkey.* But the bulk of the 9 tales, which are chiefly from *Galaxy* and *Venture,* are long novelets, adding up to over 100,000 words to make one of the most generous of recent s.f. books.

And one of the best. It's the most satisfactory Sturgeon collection since WITHOUT SORCERY (1949)—shrewdly selected for both quality and unfamiliarity. And when Sturgeon is in top form . . .

After all these years I know I shall never succeed in describing him. To write about Sturgeon at his best, you practically need to *be* Sturgeon. All I can say is: If you have the slightest serious concern for modern imaginative literature, read A TOUCH OF STRANGE. And you'd better read THE COSMIC RAPE. It has moments of pure Sturgeonesque trollery, and may well be better than I deem it . . . but I still wish that Sturgeon would write the long major novel of which he is capable.

Karen Anderson, whose verse has appeared here occasionally, establishes herself as an important amateur editor-publisher with HENRY KUTTNER: A MEMORIAL SYMPOSIUM (Sevagram, 40¢). This is the type of volume which only a fan can, as a labor of love, afford to do, and yet which is invaluable to professionals and to all but the most casual general readers.

The symposium contains critiques and reminiscences of Kuttner by Poul Anderson, Robert Bloch, Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, Richard Matheson and me; interesting oddments by Kuttner himself; and an admirable bibliography of the Kuttner and Kuttner-Moore imaginative tales by Donald H. Tuck. The quality of the whole is so very high that one's only regret is that it took Kuttner's tragic death to inspire such a project—possibly Mrs. Anderson can now edit a comparable symposium on some author who is still vertical.

Copies may be ordered from Karen Anderson, 1906 Grove St., Berkeley 5, Calif.

Scholars will also wish to add to their libraries Roger Lancelyn Green's INTO OTHER WORLDS (Abelard-Schumann, $3.75), which, though professionally published, is quite as much a non-commercial labor of love. Misleadingly subtitled "space-flight in fiction, from Lucian to Lewis," this is devoted almost exclusively to the *pre*-history of science fiction. It resolutely discusses no authors born in this century and no writings which first appeared in s.f. magazines; it underestimates and misinterprets H. G. Wells and Olaf Stapledon; indeed, the only

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authors of s.f.—as-we-now-understand-it who are justly and adequately treated are Verne and Lewis (and I am not sure that even I admire C. S. Lewis quite so much as does Mr. Green).

But what makes the book fascinating is its detailed synopses, with extensive quotation, of very nearly every fictional spaceflight before Gernsback, mostly pure fantasy, occasionally primitive s.f. Many readers will find that the briefer surveys of this incunabular period in such books as Ley's ROCKETS tell them as much as they care to know about the subject; but the insatiable enthusiast of imagined spaceflight will find this book indispensable. He will also be furious to discover that a book of such importance as a reference work is rendered all but useless by the absence of an index.

There've been a few good books of late in that weird territory of publishing which might be called science-fantasy non-fiction.

Nandor Fodor's ON THE TRAIL OF THE POLTERGEIST (Citadel, $3.95) is a long, detailed, fully documented narrative of the 1938 Thornton Heath poltergeist case, of which Fodor gave a briefer account in HAUNTED PEOPLE (1951). The phenomena, which range wildly from shoplifting by teleportation to vampiric stigmata, are not of strong evidential value—Fodor concedes that much fakery was involved. But the book is absorbing as a psychological study of an extraordinary woman, lending support to Fodor's long-standing argument for the psychological and even psychoanalytical approach to "psychic" matters.

Eric Frank Russell's GREAT WORLD MYSTERIES (Roy, $3.75) should entrance any readers unfamiliar with Charles Fort or Rupert T. Gould; and even old hands in such affairs will find occasional new research and speculation as Mr. Russell examines such perennially magic mysteries as the *Mary Celeste*, Easter Island, Kaspar Hauser, Benjamin Bathurst, levitation, spontaneous combustion, and the great sea serpent.

Russell is more restrained and reasonable than he has been in some of his ultra-Fortean magazine writings, and is particularly good on flying saucers. By "good," of course, I mean that he precisely expresses my own feelings in saying that "so far as this writer can see—which is as far as any idiot or astronomer can see— the truth may be that neither side is wholly right or wholly wrong."

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The heroine of the story below is just what the title says she is—a dream girl. She has all the attributes: she is cute and cuddly, desirable and desiring. And yet, withal, she is the girl of nobody's dreams but her own!

DREAM GIRL

by RON GOULART

THE ZIPPER IN CAPTAIN BUNNELL'S sleeping bag jammed and that gave the gorilla a head start on him. Watson was quicker and he was only a few yards behind the animal when it crashed into the forest with the screaming Jeanne Smith.

Lieutenant Watson kept his eye on Jeanne's blonde head. "Don't panic, Miss Smith!" he shouted. "I'll save you in a jiffy."

The gorilla seemed to drop suddenly into a hole. Watson slowed and moved ahead cautiously, expecting a trap. He'd lost sight of Jeanne, too. "Give a yell, Miss Smith," Lieutenant Watson called. "So I can spot you."

The forest was quiet, but for a few frightened birds fluttering away. Unsnapping his blaster Lieutenant Watson crept forward.

Jeanne was sitting in a patch of pale blue moss with her back against a tree. She held her fingers against her temple and said, "It's okay, Lieutenant. He dropped me and ran off."

"You feel all right?" He knelt and gently touched her shoulder.

She smiled faintly. "Oh, sure. Just jiggled up a little." She edged out of his reach and stood up, using the tree as a prop.

Watson frowned. "What was that thing?"

Jeanne brushed her short hair back. "A gorilla, I imagine."

"Yeah. I thought so. But I didn't think they ran wild on this planet. The only one I ever saw before was in the zoo at the capital."

"If there's a wild one around," Jeanne said, "It'd be sure to find me. I just seem to invite trouble."

"You only think you do. Come on, Miss Smith. Let's get back to camp."

"I was kidnapped from Sassoon Junior College, after all," Jeanne said, falling in at his side.

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"Not by a gorilla. Don't worry so much."

"You don't understand, Lieutenant Watson. I'm not well liked at all."

Next to the burned out campfire Captain Bunnell was half out of the sleeping bag. He looked up. "Everything squared away, Watson?"

"Yes, sir," Lieutenant Watson said, getting the coffee kit out. "Whatever it was dropped her."

"It was a wild gorilla," Jeanne said to the captain. "I'm unpopular with animals."

Kicking all the way out of the tan bag Captain Bunnell said, "Let's not have too much self-pity in our group, Miss Smith. How's that coffee coming, Watson?"

"Just about ready, sir," Watson said, trying to smile at Jeanne.

She turned away from him and went to her knapsack to get her shoes.

Captain Bunnell turned his tanned face away from the setting sun and reined up his mount. "We'll camp at that water station over there," he said and galloped off toward it.

Waiting for Jeanne to go first on her orange mount, Lieutenant Watson followed toward the gathering of dry trees around the Wilderness Bureau water station.

He had three dinner units heating over the campfire when the three bearded men appeared. Without a word the stalkiest one slapped him hard across the bridge of his nose and Lieutenant Watson stumbled back.

"Get that Smith dame," cried another of the bearded men, waving a flashing sword.

Two of them gathered up Jeanne, who began screaming, and dashed away from the water station.

Once he got his boots back on, Captain Bunnell ran for his mount to give pursuit. But the green animal shied and the captain's foot missed the stirrup and slammed into the ground. With his leg twisted under him, Captain Bunnell muttered, "Damn, my ankle."

Lieutenant Watson managed to jerk his bearded man's turban down around his nose. Then he elbowed him in the chin until he fell over. Jumping over the body, Watson got on his mount and rode off into the darkening night.

Jeanne was still screaming and Lieutenant Watson finally made out the two bearded men running across the dry field. "Keep hollering, Miss Smith! I'll catch up in a minute," he shouted.

The two abductors dropped down into a dry river bed and were out of sight for a moment.

Riding along the edge of the incline, Lieutenant Watson called, "Hey, Miss Smith. Give a yell, huh?"

He got a flash of her blonde

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hair in the moonlight. She was walking toward him, alone, kicking at rocks. "No need to make noise, Lieutenant," she said. "They dumped me. Everybody seems anxious to make off with me. But nobody wants to keep me." She shrugged. "That's usual."

Watson dismounted and helped Jeanne into the saddle. "This is rough country, Miss Smith. Anybody could get abducted."

"Not as often as me." She looked toward the campfire. "What happened to Captain Bunnell this time?"

"I think he sprained his ankle. I was fighting off the other bandit at the time."

"Oh. Is he hurt badly?"

"The captain? I don't think so." Watson watched her face. "Funny bandits, huh? Using swords. Pretty old-fashioned. And no mounts."

"I get carried off by all sorts of misfits," Jeanne said.

The third man had crept off while the captain was taping his twisted ankle. After dinner it was quiet for the rest of the night.

Five miles from the Original Nine Inn, lightning flashed over the yellow plains, then came thunder. Four miles, and the first rain—big flat-splashing drops.

"You think this damp will upset your sprained foot, Captain Bunnell?" Jeanne asked.

"I only twisted my ankle, Miss Smith. I don't have a sprain. Or gout," Captain Bunnell replied. "Now let's concentrate on getting to the Nine as fast as possible."

"That's our half-way point, Miss Smith," Lieutenant Watson said, spurring his mount. "We'll have you back in school in a week."

"They don't much like me at college. The whole bunch at Sassoon J. C." she said, huddling her shoulders as the rain came faster.

Night was early. From the small dining room, Lieutenant Watson watched the rain splash the stables across the court.

Jeanne was sitting on a stool near the stone fireplace. "I suppose you have a steady girl back in the capital, Captain Bunnell?"

The captain pulled his straight chair back from the glow of the fire. "Not anyone you'd call steady, Miss Smith."

"Man of the world, huh? Play the field."

Captain Bunnell stood up. "I think I'll read until meal time, Watson. You can keep an eye on things here."

Turning from the window, Lieutenant Watson said, "Yes, sir. It's too slippery for abductions tonight."

"Need any help up the stairs?" Jeanne said to the captain, half rising.

"None at all, Miss Smith." He walked away with hardly a trace of limp.

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Sitting in the captain's empty chair, Lieutenant Watson said, "What'd you take in college, Miss Smith?"

"Dull courses. My parents only sent me to Sasson J. C. to get even with me for being a bitchy kid." She moved toward the fire, tucking her knees under her. "I guess my getting kidnapped from there scared hell out of them."

"Woman of the world, huh?" Watson said, stretching his legs out.

"Go to hell, Lieutenant Watson." Jeanne got up and went away.

In the flash of lightning, Lieutenant Watson noticed that the fat man sitting on his chest was wearing dark glasses. It seemed an odd thing to do at midnight.

"Don't move, fool!" said the fat man. He held what looked like a dueling blaster of about fifty years before. "We're ganging up on Jeanne Smith again and you idiots can't stop us."

"Damn your fat ass," Watson said and swung at the fat man.

"It is foolish to struggle." He lunged at Lieutenant Watson's face with a silk scarf.

From the hall, Watson heard Jeanne's screams for help. Then the clatter of Captain Bunnell's boots. Apparently he'd fought free. Watson twisted and swung up again at the dark glasses. The scarf, smelling too sweet, pushed into his nose and mouth. He choked and slowly lost awareness of the fat man.

Lieutenant Watson sat up, conscious again, just as the door of his room swung softly open. He tumbled to the floor with his pistol in his hand. Then the light from the half-open hall door shone on Captain Bunnell's muddy boots. With one hand raised for silence, the captain closed the hall door.

"You can light a lamp now, Jake," the captain said.

Surprised at hearing his first name, Lieutenant Watson hesitated. Then pushed the light button for his reading lamp. "Is Jeanne okay, sir?" he asked, looking around for his boots.

The captain nodded and sat down in the chair over which Watson had hung his tunic and shirt. Toying with the Crime Bureau shoulder patch on the tunic, Captain Bunnell said, "I got her back to her room and made her take a sleeping capsule. Yes, she's okay."

"You rescued her? Some fat guy used knockout gas on me. How about you?"

"My rescue efforts were unhampered." The captain held up a small bottle. "This is the stuff they used on you, I think."

Lieutenant Watson didn't bother to examine the bottle. "What's wrong, sir?"

"Jake," the captain said. "I

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couldn't do it. Damn it all."

"What?"

"It wouldn't have been wise. Not for a CB man. She's just turned twenty-one. Right, Jake?"

Lieutenant Watson had one boot on and the other swinging in his hand. "I don't think I follow. Well, I do. But I must be wrong."

Captain Bunnell stood up. "Miss Smith is an intense young person. She is in need of the Psych Bureau, Jake." He sat down.

Dropping the boot, Lieutenant Watson said, "How so?"

"This whole kidnapping was a figment of her imagination."

"We had witnesses, sir. That's how we tracked her down."

"Jake, this girl has a persecution complex. She tells me she's read up on it. It's what Weiner, the famous brain delusion man, calls an audio-visual persecution complex. That is, her pursuers take on actual form."

"Sure, the fat guy who sat on me," Watson said. "And those silly guys with the old-fashioned weapons."

The captain nodded. "The gorilla, too. All figments of her imagination. Whenever Miss Smith gets feeling low somebody pops up and carries her off."

"You figured it out all at once tonight?"

"She told me." Captain Bunnell leaned and picked up Watson's dropped boot. "She has another fantastic delusion, Jake."

"Oh?"

"It seems she tried to work it each time that I would rescue her. Well, Jake, the reason was she wanted to be alone with me." The captain held the boot up with one hand and started it swinging with the other. "That's why the abductors vanished when you went after her." He dropped the boot and folded his hands. "She wanted me to seduce her, Jake."

Lieutenant Watson tried a shrug. "So what? I've thought of the same thing."

"You've thought about my seducing Miss Smith?"

"No, sir. I was thinking of doing it myself. But she doesn't seem to be interested."

"Well, she is attractive, Jake. But you know a good CB man doesn't seduce something he's rescuing."

"She's of age."

Captain Bunnell stoood again. "I just wanted to fill you in on the situation, Watson. There's one other thing. She wasn't convinced when I told her about a CB man having a code that he couldn't break."

Watson smiled and swung his feet up on the bed, shining his boot with his toes. "That must have set you back, sir."

"So, Watson, I told her that actually I had nothing against the idea. But that you were very

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strait-laced. That if anything of this sort happened you'd sense it. That you had a nose for such things."

Watson fell back and locked his hands behind his head. "And, sir?"

"Well, I told her that after we got safely home and out from under your scrutiny things would be different. I even have the address of her college dormitory." The captain hesitated, then backed out of the room. "Good night, Jake."

"Good night, sir." Watson smiled and listened to the rain until very late.

The fields were hot with mid-morning heat. Jeanne stretched her bare arms up over her head, twisting slightly in the saddle. Her hair flickered gold in the bright light.

Captain Bunnell watched her for a moment. "We should reach the next water station in time for lunch, Watson," he said.

"Yes, sir."

Jeanne moistened her lips. "I hope you weren't hurt last night, Watson."

"Oh, no, Jeanne."

Captain Bunnell frowned and pulled ahead on his mount.

In the shade of an artificial Wilderness Bureau tree, Lieutenant Watson flipped out the regulation checkered table cloth.

Jeanne hugged her tanned knees up close to her chin. "Couldn't I swim in the pool, Watson?"

Captain Bunnell shook his head. "It's not permitted, Miss Smith."

"That's right, Jeanne," Watson said, handing her a sandwich.

"It's too hot to eat anything," she said, kicking off her shoes.

Captain Bunnell cleared his throat. "I'll take it, Watson." He reached out for the small sandwich.

Someone gave a war whoop nearby, and then three bronze men in spotted loin cloths burst into the shade area, waving spears.

Lieutenant Watson picked up a sandwich for himself and glanced at Jeanne.

She screamed. One bronze man growled and grabbed her up in his arms. He ran off into the high hot yellow grass.

Captain Bunnell bit into his sandwich and watched the figures retreat. "She's still at it."

Watson smiled. "They might be real, sir." He got up as one of the remaining savages started for him.

"Might be at that." The captain put down his sandwich and unstrapped his pistol. "You sit tight, Watson. I'll look after that end of it."

The second man lunged at Lieutenant Watson as Captain Bunnell ran off into the grass. Watson was reaching for his blaster when the flat end of a spear knocked him out.

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Lieutenant Watson blinked. He was sweating in the hot afternoon sun. Rubbing his head carefully, he sat up. The water station was empty. No spear carriers, no Captain Bunnell, no Jeanne. His legs were a little unsteady.

He circled around the camp and called Jeanne's name. No one answered. Watson frowned at the sun. He checked his watch. He'd been out for over an hour.

Sitting down in the center of the checkered cloth he looked at each of the yellow fields around him.

It was almost certain that the savages had been Jeanne's and that she'd wanted to lure the captain off again.

Still Captain Bunnell wasn't an easy man to lure. Drawing his pistol, Lieutenant Watson started away from the camp. It was best to check and be sure. There was a possibility that the savages were real. And Jeanne and the captain might be in trouble.

If not, he'd just excuse himself when he found them, back away, come to the water station, eat a sandwich and wait.

Watson had been circling the camp for nearly a half hour when he heard some noise in a scrubby field of high cane.

"Jeanne! Captain!" he shouted. "Is everything okay?"

Something slid out of the cane. It was a large tiger, tail swishing. Lieutenant Watson grinned and turned away. He wasn't sure about gorillas, but he knew they had tigers only at the capital zoo. Even before the second tiger appeared he realized they weren't real. They were just some of Jeanne's creations.

So everything was okay and he started for the water station.

Then he realized that Jeanne's tigers were after him.

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Cornell Woolrich, a top mystery writer for the last 25-odd years, probably has written more fine stories of pure suspense than anybody. He has a very special talent for making ordinary people come alive on the page—and plunging them, and the reader, into gripping, headlong terror. Inquiring and restless, Mr. Woolrich often experiments with new ways of getting the most out of words—as he does in this new story, told largely in dialogue. It concerns a countess who could not win at the gambling tables, a young girl who could not win at life, and the extraordinary manner in which their paths crossed. It is not a story of crime or of terror in any ordinary sense—yet it is probable that only Woolrich could have written it.

Somebody's Clothes—Somebody's Life

by Cornell Woolrich

Scene One

(In the gambling room at the Casino in Biarritz, seven or eight backs stand shoulder to shoulder, so that they conceal the roulette table they are lined against. The middle one is unclothed, that of a woman in a backless white evening gown. Immediately behind her a maid is seated on a straight-backed gilt chair. She is plainly dressed, wears a pair of old-fashioned rimless glasses and is crocheting a strip of lace. On her lap in addition is a taffeta draw-bag. She pays no attention to the proceedings. A clicking sound is heard, as the little ball spins around and around. It stops with a little snap, like a wooden matchstick being broken, as the ball drops into the slot.)

CROUPIER: Seventeen, black!

(There is a low murmur of mingled voices like the humming of a swarm of bees, combining resignation, disappointment, annoyance, surprise, and satisfaction.)

CROUPIER: Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen.

(The woman in the backless white gown suddenly thrusts her arm behind her, toward the maid, with three fingers held out to show how much she requires. The maid immediately interrupts her crocheting, pries into the draw-bag, counts out three bank-

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notes, and places them in the waiting hand. The arm returns to the table again.)

CROUPIER: Nothing more goes. Nothing more.

(Again the clicking sound, again the little snap.)

CROUPIER: Eleven, red!

(Again the low murmur of mingled voices.)

CROUPIER: Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen.

(Again the arm is thrust out toward the maid. This time all five fingers are extended. They close, then open again, in a grasping motion, to show their owner is impatient. The maid shakes her head to herself. She opens the draw-bag, takes out five banknotes, places them in the waiting hand. The arm twists back to the table again.)

CROUPIER: Nothing more goes. Nothing more.

(Again the clicking sound.)

CROUPIER: Sixteen, black!

(Again the murmuring voices.)

CROUPIER: Place your bets, ladies and gentlemen.

(Again the insatiable arm extends itself, all fingers out, fluttering. The maid inserts her whole hand into the draw-bag this time, as one would try on a glove. She turns the bag inside-out. It is empty.)

MAID: It's all gone, madame. There's no more left.

(The arm slowly wilts, drops down to its owner's side like a withered vine. Then the woman slowly turns and forces her way out from between the other players. She is a handsome woman, in her forties or early fifties, but now her face is haggard, drawn. A lock of her silvery hair has fallen down over one eye. She staggers, almost as if she were drunk. The maid quickly rises, puts aside her crocheting, and puts an arm around her waist to support her.)

MAID: Lean on me, madame. The fresh air will help you pull yourself together..

COUNTESS: Haven't you any money of your own you could let me have? I could give it back to you tomorrow.

MAID (wryly): I never carry money of my own with me when I go out with madame in the evening. I learned not to long ago.

COUNTESS (dazed): What'll I do?

MAID: Come away now, madame. Come back to your hotel. You've been in here since it first opened, hours ago.

COUNTESS (lifts her arm, looks at a diamond bracelet she is wearing as though having forgotten she had it on): Oh—This—

MAID (quickly stops her by putting her hand over it): You know they won't accept jewelry at the table, madame. You've tried before.

COUNTESS: Maybe I could sell it to someone in the room here.

MAID (pleading): Madame.

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Madame. It's the last of all the beautiful pieces you once had.

(She picks up her crocheting from the chair-seat, stuffs it into the draw-bag.)

MAID (in a choked voice): I can't bear to watch much more of this. I just can't stand it. It does something to me. I'm afraid I'm going to have to leave you, madame, at the end of the week.

(Countess doesn't answer, as though she hasn't heard her. Stands there looking around avidly, licking her lips, as if in search of a possible source of money.)

MAID: This is a fever.

COUNTESS (indifferently): And there is no quinine for it.

MAID (coaxing her gently, as if she were a child): Come, madame. Come away now.

(They walk slowly across the large room, the countess leaning exhaustedly against the maid. The Casino doorman, standing motionless to one side of the glass doors leading out, stiffens to attention, pulls one of the two glass doors open, holds it that way in readiness, touches two fingers to the visor of his uniform cap.)

DOORMAN (respectfully, ducking his head): Goodnight, madame. Goodnight, mademoiselle.

(As though this has suddenly attracted her attention to him, the countess raises her head, stops, looks at him, frees herself from the maid, takes a step over toward him.)

COUNTESS: Young man — my friend—I wonder if by any chance you could lend me—

MAID (horrified): Madame!

(She quickly places herself between the two of them, tactfully turns the countess away, guides her to the door, which he has continued to hold open for them, and out through it.)

MAID: Madame, consider what you are doing.

(The maid looks around over her shoulder at the doorman. She shakes her head to him, pityingly. He nods his head in agreement with her, also pityingly. He lets the door ease closed again, holding it so that it doesn't swing . . .)

Scene Two

(Living room of a villa. It is furnished in rather old-fashioned, mediocre, overcrowded taste. In the center of the room there is a round table and two chairs. The doorbell rings. The woman who goes to the door is past middle-age but still lithe. Her hair is worn in the Slavic fashion, in a braid wound circularly around her head like a coronet, and she wears a Russian peasant blouse, white-bordered with colored embroidery. She opens the door. The countess is standing before it.)

ROULETTE-PLAYER: You are the clairvoyant?

CLAIRVOYANT: I prefer to call myself a consultant. I am not a

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fortune-teller, whatever you may think. I give advice, but I do not make predictions.

ROULETTE-PLAYER: Forgive me.

CLAIRVOYANT: You are the lady who telephoned for a private appointment? Countess—?

COUNTESS (stopping her with a slight gesture of her hand): I am. No names are necessary.

CLAIRVOYANT: I understand. Come in, won't you please? (*Closes the door*) Sit down, madame. May I offer you some tea?

COUNTESS: It may make me less nervous.

CLAIRVOYANT (pausing on her way out): You are nervous of me?

COUNTESS: Just nervous altogether.

(Clairvoyant raises her brows, then goes out. Countess, waiting, is extremely restless. Drums her fingers on tabletop. Takes out a cigarette, lights it with noticeably shaky hands, takes only a puff or two, then gets rid of it again. Clairvoyant reenters left, carrying a samovar.)

COUNTESS: You are Russian, aren't you?

(Clairvoyant places samovar on table. While the next few remarks are being exchanged, she pours tea, each of them takes a swallow or two, then pushes it aside. The clairvoyant takes up a deck of cards, shuffles them, and begins to deal them out before her, very slowly, as if engaged in playing solitaire. Their conversation meanwhile has continued without a break.

CLAIRVOYANT: I was, when there was still a Russia. Now I am a person without a country. They used to call us White Russians. Today even that name is forgotten.

COUNTESS: I have a pressing need of guidance, of advice.

CLAIRVOYANT: I know.

COUNTESS: Then you know also the subject on which I need it?

CLAIRVOYANT: The casino.

COUNTESS (nodding): The casino. How did you know?

CLAIRVOYANT: Your nervous gestures. The way in which your eyes almost seem to burn.

COUNTESS (somberly): It is that easy to tell. I didn't realize..

CLAIRVOYANT: I have lived many years in this world, my friend. (*Staring at her intently*) You *must* play?

COUNTESS: While I live, I must play. If I were to lock myself in my room and throw the key out of the window, still somehow I would find myself beside that table that very same night.

CLAIRVOYANT (almost contemptuously, with the contempt that a non-drinker has for an alcoholic): I have heard it is this way.

COUNTESS (wearily): Then you've heard right.

CLAIRVOYANT: And you want my advice. And yet I know and you know, we both know, that you won't take it. Still, here it is.

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I give it anyway. (*Slowly, with heavy emphasis*) *Do not play.*

COUNTESS: As well ask me to stop breathing. (*Leaning toward her, in desperation*) You must help me. You must. I don't want to be lectured, I want to be helped.

CLAIRVOYANT: Let us go back, then, before we go forward. Have you ever won, at any time? Think, now.

COUNTESS: Many times. Oh, many times. But I didn't stop soon enough, that was the only trouble. I went on playing too long, after I should have stopped, and—

CLAIRVOYANT: There is no 'too soon,' there is no 'too long.' There is only one terminal point in this, and that is the point at which you *did* stop. Now let me repeat: when you stopped, had you won?

COUNTESS (In a low, hopeless voice): Never.

CLAIRVOYANT: Judge by that then. The past is the future that lies behind us. The future is the past that lies before us. They are one and the same. Only fools think they can divide them down the middle. You have never won. You never *will* win. Not tonight, not a week from now, not a year from now. There is something about your personality, your being, let us call it your aura, that attracts only bad luck at the gambling-table. I have seen it in these cards here. The money cards, the diamond suite, have all consistently avoided your own card, which is this one here.

COUNTESS (skeptically): Are they infallible?

CLAIRVOYANT: Ask yourself that, not me. Have you ever won? Then they *are* infallible. It is something about you, it is inexplicable, but there it is.

COUNTESS: But what am I to do? I know that I'll go back there again. I can't stay away.

CLAIRVOYANT: Have somebody else place your bets for you. But remember one thing, the selection must be theirs, not yours. It won't help any if you tell them which plays to make. That is still you playing, then.

COUNTESS: I couldn't! I couldn't do it! Not play myself? Just watch while somebody else plays for me? It's the excitement, the urge, to play myself that drives me on. If I am thirsty, and you give the water to someone else, will that quench *my* thirst?

CLAIRVOYANT (spreading her hands resignedly): Well, there you have it. That's all I can tell you.

COUNTESS: You say it's my aura, my personality. Couldn't I alter it in some way, hide it, disguise it, and so change my luck?

CLAIRVOYANT: You mean tamper with your own destiny? For that is actually what you would be doing. That can be dangerous, madame.

COUNTESS: Let it be. Anything

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at all would be better than this.

CLAIRVOYANT: You could try. But I guarantee nothing.

COUNTESS: I ask no guarantee. I wouldn't bet on a sure thing even if I could, for then it would have no attraction for me. It's the risk I like. All I ask is the outside chance.

CLAIRVOYANT (laughing ruefully): Even in this you bet. You not only bet on the game itself, but you bet on the betting on the game.

COUNTESS: And is this all you can do for me?

CLAIRVOYANT: No. Since the consultation is not gratis, I can amplify it, I can dress it up. All you wish. Very well, let's garnish it, then. *Everything about you must be different.* That goes much deeper than just the clothes you wear, the way you wear your hair, or the perfume you use. Inside yourself is where the real change must be. And can you do that, madame?

COUNTESS: I can try.

CLAIRVOYANT: Your thoughts must be the thoughts of someone else. The way you move, the very way you breathe, must be the way of somebody else. In your own mind you must *be* somebody else, you must believe you *are* somebody else. You must not even think of your own name or tell yourself what it is. It is no longer your name, it is the name of a stranger, who has nothing to do with you. Those whom the old-you knew, no matter how closely, the new-you no longer knows. Those whom the new-you knows, if any, will be those whom the old-you did not know. And—all this is impossible to accomplish. Humanly impossible. No, it cannot be done. And if it could, it might be better not to. You might damage yourself, destroy yourself in some way.

COUNTESS (growing more excited): I can try! I can try!

CLAIRVOYANT (drily): Let me wish you luck, madame. *Bonne chance.*

COUNTESS (fervently): I *will* do it! I will! I don't know how, yet, but I will accomplish it.

CLAIRVOYANT (dubiously): Let us hope.

(She rises to her feet. The countess follows suit. The latter opens her handbag, brings out a handful of currency, places it on the table.)

COUNTESS: With your permission.

CLAIRVOYANT (shrugging matter of factly, as she ushers her visitor to the door, opens it for her): One's time was given up, granted.

COUNTESS (suddenly seizing the other's hand and kissing it with gratitude): You don't know how you've helped me! You don't know how!

CLAIRVOYANT (inscrutably): Have I...?

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Scene Three

(The base of the Rochier de la Vierge, a rocky promontory jutting out high over the ocean at Biarritz. Around the base runs an iron guard-rail, and flanking this a paved walk. Along this walk slowly moves the countess. Her aspect is that of a woman in despair, who does not notice where she is going and does not care. She has evidently been gambling again, and with the usual result. The direction she comes from is that of the casino, and she is again wearing the spreading white dress. She stops and rests her back against the waist-high rail, one arm akimbo against it. She remains motionless thus for some time. . . .

(Suddenly some sort of a cloth, a garment, light-colored, drifts down from above, dangles over the rail for a moment, finally settles down to the ground near her. She notices it, stares. She steps over to it, picks it up, holds it extended at arms' width. It is a woman's cheap dress, plain, ordinary. Another garment floats down. Something in the nature of an undergarment, this time. Still holding the first one, she goes toward this, then stops and looks upward, to the top of the rock. On it, pale against the dark night-sky, is the undraped figure of a woman, hair streaming in the wind, who is about to throw herself into the churning, rock-spraying water far below.

(Horror and incredulity are stamped on the upturned face of the countess. A scream is heard, long-drawn and gradually fading away, as when someone falls from a great height. The top of the rock is empty now. . . . The countess, still holding the original garment she picked up, finally lowers her head and folds her arm in front of it, as if to wipe out what she has just seen.)

COUNTESS (to herself): That is what I should do, but I haven't her courage.

(She removes her arm from before her face at last, goes to the remaining garments which have fallen and picks them up, one at a time.)

COUNTESS: Be someone else, she said to me. (*Looks at the garments*) What better way?

(She follows the path around the turn of the rock, and off camera. When she returns, she is in the clothing of the unknown woman who has just taken her life. She stops against the rail a moment, face to camera.)

COUNTESS: I can go back there now. I can go back and win. Win back everything I lost earlier tonight. That, and perhaps more. (*Passes her hands slowly down her sides*) Now I'm someone else. In clothes still warm from someone else's body. Still reeking with her thoughts, her hopes, her fears.

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Almost, I can still feel her blood coursing within these clothes, her heart beating. (*Shields her eyes a moment*) I must not think who I am, what my name is. Was. (*Uncovers them again*) I must keep thinking, I am she. (*Slowly*) I am she. (*More slowly still*) I am she. (*Moves away from railing*) I must go back there now. I must go back —Where? I've forgotten. There was somewhere I wanted to go. But I've forgotten—where.

(Her head droops, as if she were dozing on her feet. Suddenly she lifts it, as if recalling.)

COUNTESS: Oh, yes, I must go—Home. Home to him. He's waiting. Waiting for me to come home.

(Opens the other woman's shabby handbag, takes out a lipstick, passes it across her mouth just once, puts it back again.)

COUNTESS: Just one more touch. Just one more try. Just one more, before I quit. And then I'm going home. Home to him.

Scene Four

Night. The promenade des Tamaris, overlooking the shore. A paved walk, and a stone ballustrade or parapet, no more than waist-high. A pool of light from a street lamp falls on the center of the walk and of the ballustrade. On the ballustrate, picked out by the light, the remains of a tattered movie-poster. Only the title still visible on it the rest a blur. "Jeux Interdits." The black silhouettes of tamarick leaves, dangling from the branches lost in the dark above.

(She enters, perches slantwise atop ballustrade, one leg touching ground, one dangling clear. The position of her body effectively covers up the movie-poster, or at least the title on it . . . "Forbidden Games." She takes a cigarette from her bag, lights it, takes a single puff, then frugally stamps it out against the stone surface she is sitting on, and carefully retains it for further use.

(She glances down the walk, sees a man approaching, and immediately relights the cigarette, her manner expectant. The man comes nearer, his head slightly lowered, hands in his pockets, not too well-dressed. He walks tiredly. He doesn't raise his head to look at her from first to last, as he passes her.)

GIRL (in a peculiar, almost infantile sing-song, more like the squeak of a mechanical doll than the voice of a living person, as though she has made this salutation countless numbers of times, and it has long ago lost all meaning to her): Evening, dear.

MAN (surlily, and without breaking pace): Get out of here. Don't bother me.

(He goes on. She puts out the cigarette again, carefully retains it for further use. . . . A moment later she sees someone else coming, from the same direction as

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the last time. She relights the cigarette, again staring expectantly while doing so. Another man enters, this time better dressed, almost dapper, more alert to his surroundings.)

GIRL (in same sing-song): Evening, dear.

MAN (pauses, turns his head, and looks at her): Oh, it's you again. We've met before, haven't we?

GIRL (noncommitally): I know.

MAN (patronizingly): Well, I can spend a moment's time—if you can.

(She slips down from the parapet with alacricity, and links her arm in his. With the arm away from her, he surreptitiously removes a billfold from his rear pocket and transfers it to the inside pocket of his coat, where it will be more inaccessible. They walk off together. The poster, restored to view now that she has stood up, remains conspicuously visible for a moment in the center of the low stone wall. "Jeux Interdits.")

Scene Five

(A strip of sidewalk along one of the main shopping-streets of the town. At this hour however it is deserted. Standing before a corrugated iron shutter drawn down over some anonymous shop-window, is a solitary gendarme. The girl approaches him, passes by quickly, her head held down as though he inspires her with a guilty, or at least timorous feeling. As she goes by, he turns his head slowly, following her with his eyes. He stands there like that for several moments, as if watching to see what she will do or where she will go.)

GENDARME (finally, raising his voice with curt authority): Hey, you! Come back here a minute. (*Pause*) Come back here, I said! I want to talk to you.

(She reenters scene at right, goes up close to him, stands there obviously frightened, her head still hanging.)

GIRL (meekly): Yes, Captain?

GENDARME (rocking back and forth on his heels, for emphasis): I thought I told you girls to stay off the main streets, like this one, here in this town.

GIRL: Yes, Captain.

GENDARME: Then what are you doing on it?

GIRL (submissively): I'm sorry, Captain.

GENDARME: I have my orders from the higher-ups, just like I give mine to you. And don't try to win me over by calling me Captain every other moment, it won't get you anywhere. Now, I don't care if you want to hang around down by the seafront-walks, where you aren't likely to attract attention, but don't let me catch you again on one of these brightly-lighted streets in this part of town.

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It gives the town a very bad name. Respectable people don't like it, they complain. This is the last time I'm going to warn you. If I come across you again, I'm going to run you in.

GIRL: I was just on my way home, that was all. I live just down there, lower end of the Rue Mazagran. The only way I can get to it is by crossing through here.

GENDARME (gruffly): That's what you told me last night too. What's your name? (*As she takes a moment to answer*) What's the matter, don't you know your own name?

GIRL (vaguely): I do, but just for a moment I couldn't think. I'm tired. Paule's my name. Paule.

GENDARME: Paule what?

GIRL (backs her hand across her eyes for a moment, dazedly): Paule Moret.

GENDARME (nodding approval): All right. That's what you told me last night too. All right, Paule, now you listen to me if you want to stay out of trouble— (*Stares at her more closely*) What did you do to your face? You don't look quite the same to me, somehow.

GIRL (meekly): Nothing, *patron.*

GENDARME: Something different about you, I could swear. I don't know exactly what.

GIRL (placatingly): I'm just like always.

GENDARME (shrugging): Well, that's your own affair, I suppose. (*More severely*) Anyway, don't make me talk to you again, understand?

GIRL (docilely): I won't. I promise.

GENDARME: All right, go ahead.

GIRL (obsequiously): Thank you, *patron.*

(She hurries off, the sound of her hasty footsteps dying away down the street. He stands looking after her, fingering his mustache in perplexity.)

GENDARME: I suppose that's all they have, those poor devils, their faces. That's why they're always fiddling around with them, trying to change them and improve them. I can't tell what it was, but there was something different about her.

(Turns, finally, and strolls off, left.)

Scene Six

(The scene is dark, as an unlighted room would be. Footsteps climbing stairs are heard under. One flight, then a pause at the landing. Then the next flight. Growing louder as they come higher and nearer. Then a pause as if before a door and the sound of a key being put into it. Then the door opens. A sweep of light from the stairs outside passes swiftly across a wall as it does

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so. The door closes again and the sweep of light goes out.)

MAN (in a sigh of inexpressible content, as when one has waited for hours): At last.

GIRL (sighing too): Back again.

MAN: You stood there outside it a minute or two, before you came in. I could tell. What was it?

GIRL: Nothing. The stairs. My breath.

MAN: The beat of my heart told me it was you.

GIRL: Shall I put up the light?

MAN: You'd better have it, for yourself. You'll need it.

(Sound of a switch clicking. The scene becomes a room. A man is sitting there on a straight-backed chair placed flat against the wall. He is crouched over his own lap, as if he had been sitting there like that for a long time. His hands dangle limply down, inside his thighs. His head is raised, though, and he is staring straight before him. Eyes that are open, but do not move. The kind of eyes that do not see.

(At his elbow, also flat against the wall, is a small, narrow wooden table with a cheap clock on it. A diagonal crack runs down the plaster of the wall, from upper-right to lower-left.

(She does not enter the scene at once, but her shadow passes back and forth a number of times across the wall before which he sits.)

MAN (wistfully): It's late — again.

GIRL: Later than it should be. Every night the same story. They keep me working on overtime.

(He picks up the little clock, which has no glass over its face. Does not look at it but explores the hands delicately with his fingertips, holding it down flat over his lap instead of upright as others would.)

MAN: We talk to each other, this little clock and I, all through the lonely hours of waiting. Its conversation is limited. But then —(*smiles across the room at her.*) —so is my vision. We come out about equal. I say to it, 'Will she be here soon?' and it answers me, 'Tikk.' That stands for yes. I say to it, 'Is that her step out there now, far off down the quiet street?' and it answers me, 'Tokk.' That stands for maybe. That's all it ever says, yes and maybe, never no. But that's something, don't you think?

(Her outline on the wall stands still for a moment, lowers its face, covers it with both hands.)

MAN: I put my fingers to it, and I can hear its little heart going inside, beating for someone like mine does.

(She enters the scene, back to camera, going toward him. And then she turns. Her clothes are the clothes of the woman who leaped from the rock, whose life this is. Her face is the face of the woman

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who stood at the roulette-table, of the woman who consulted the clairvoyant. She takes down a small cannister from the shelf. She takes something from out of the top of her stocking and puts it into the cannister, giving him a quick look as she does so.)

HE: They paid you tonight at the factory?

GIRL (softly, and with a shudder): Yes.

HE: It was getting very empty in there, wasn't it?

GIRL (with despair): Very. Did you . . . ?

HE: Yes, I shook it once, when you were out. I knew you were worried. I'd heard you pick it up and put it down again, twice, before you left, but without opening it.

(Her hand goes into the cannister. It brings out several metal bolts and washers, holds them up in its palm. Drops them in again. They clink like coins would.)

GIRL: But now it isn't empty any more. It's all right now. Bread. Those little sausages. The wine for the meals. Maybe even a package of Caporals for you—

(Her voice trails off disconsolately.)

HE (leaning forward expectantly, face held up, trying to find her): Aren't you going to kiss me? You haven't yet.

GIRL (wincing, backing her hand to her mouth as though to keep it from him, looking away from him as she does so): This minute. This very minute. First, just let me—

(Goes off. Sound of a little water being poured into a washbasin. Then sound of it trickling off someone's fingers. She enters again, drawing a cloth across her lips. Back and forth, over and over again, as though she could never get them clean enough. Throws it away behind her, goes to him, drops to her knees, tilts her face up toward his, and their lips meet in a long, desperate kiss, like two lost souls.)

HE (slowly, as their lips finally part): My darling. My sweetheart. My wife.

GIRL (slowly): My love. My husband. My life.

HE: Why are there drops on your cheeks like that?

GIRL: It's the water from the basin. My face gets grubby from—the factory.

HE: But we only have cold water—and these are warm.

GIRL: Is the loneliness over now? That's all that matters.

HE: I can't remember it. What was it like?

GIRL: Shall I fix you something?

HE: I don't want food. I don't need food—now. Just stay here close. Close to me. Close. The time we have is so little. The terrible loneliness of love. (*His fingers lightly trace and stroke her hair.*) Love *is* loneliness. Even if I

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had eyes, it would still be loneliness.

GIRL: A cigarette?

HE: You're here with me. I need no third thing to intrude upon us.

GIRL: Did the little boy from downstairs come and take you out as usual?

HE: He found a nice bench for me, around where the fishing boats lie. I sat there in the sun. Then he came back for me and brought me home again when it got dark.

GIRL: He's a good little boy. He's kind.

HE: He told me his older sister works there at the same factory you do. She hasn't seen you there in over a month.

(She closes her eyes. Keeps them closed for a moment. Finally opens them again)

GIRL (quietly): She works days, I work nights, that's why. You know that. They transferred me to the night-shift about a month ago. I told you at the time. Some they let out altogether, but me—I work nights now. (*Her voice trails off*) I work nights now. (*She drops her head suddenly, as if overcome, then raises it again*) Don't talk to the neighbors in the house too much. They mean no harm, but—People are people. Sometimes people say things that might hurt you. I don't want anyone to hurt you.

HE: They're just voices I pass on the stairs. Voices without faces. No one exists for me, only you. (*His fingers explore her face, lightly passing over her forehead, her cheeks, the turn of her chin*) You haven't changed. You're still the same. Still the same as that last time I ever saw you, before the light went out.

GIRL: Everything changes. Everything has to. Only one thing never does. Never does. Love. But even the very one who loves, even she changes too.

HE: Not you. You'll always be as you were in the beginning. When love was new, and I was a brand-new husband, and you were my brand-new wife. And we had the brand-new little house, remember? I'd come back at the end of the day, and you'd meet me out in the garden, holding newly cut flowers in your arms. Something so clean and fresh about the way you looked, always. So unspoiled.

GIRL (pleading): Not those words. Some others. Any others. Gay. Youthful. Even beautiful, if you want. Not those.

HE: But it was that about you, always that, more than anything else. You were not the most beautiful girl in the world. Anyone can be that. A red crayon at the mouth, a black one at the eyes, can make that. You were the freshest-looking—what other word can I use?—the cleanest-looking vision that ever appeared before the eyes of a man in love—

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GIRL (moans): Don't. Not that word.

HE: Clean as sunlight on dew. Clean as a crystal waterfall cascading into a rock-pool. Clean as little puff-ball clouds after a summer shower has washed the sky. When you came into a room, the April breeze came in with you. Clover came in with you. That was the girl my love was, that was the girl my love is.

(A long pause follows)

HE: What is it? You're so still. You almost don't seem to breathe —There's distress, pulsing at me, beating at me. I can feel it.

(She crumples, slides gradually downward to the floor, crouches there on hands and knees, her head hanging over. His hand that had been caressing her hair remains extended, empty. As if so stricken she cannot rise, she begins to pull herself away from him, still along the floor on hands and knees. She reaches the door and pulls herself upright against it by grasping the knob with trembling hands. First her back is to the room, to him. Then with great effort, still holding onto the door, she turns to face him.

(His face gives a half-turn to this side, a half-turn to that, trying to locate her.)

HE (bewildered): What have I said? Only tell me, tell me, and I'll unsay it, I'll take it back!

GIRL: It's too late. You've pulled me apart with just one word, just one. Now nothing can ever put me together again.

HE (with mounting alarm): You're standing by the door now. I can hear your voice sound against the wooden panel. What are you thinking of, where are you going?

GIRL (softly): Goodbye, my love.

HE (fully frightened now, terrified): Paule, the door is open now! I hear the emptiness of the stairs in back of your voice!

GIRL (more softly than before): Goodbye, love.

HE (shouting): Paule, the light's going out again! Don't take my light away, the only light I have! (*Crying out wildly*) *Paule, don't leave me in the dark!*

GIRL (in a whisper): Goodbye.

(The doorway is standing empty. The sound of her footsteps running down the stairs comes from the other side of it, gradually diminishing in the distance.)

HE (*screaming in despair*): Paule, don't go! The litle clock and I, we want you here! Paule, come back! Come back! The dark! The dark! The terrible dark!

(A closed door on a lower landing of the stair suddenly opens and a woman sticks her head out. Just as she does so, the girl reaches the landing, slows momentarily to make the turn, but without stopping altogether.)

WOMAN (severely): Will you kindly be more quiet! All that

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shouting up there! And running down the stairs like that at this hour! People are trying to sleep, you know.

GIRL (turning her head for just an instant as she goes by): Be patient, madame. Just a moment or two, and I won't make another sound. I'll be still forever after.

(She continues running on down the next flight. Woman stares after her, mouth open, as if not knowing whether she understood rightly what she just heard.)

(At the parapet along the Promenade des Tamaris, the movie poster is still in its center, "*Jeux Interdits.*" The girl runs by it. She is tottering now from exhaustion. As she passes, she is struggling with her dress, trying to get out of it.)

The dress flutters down from the tops of the Rocher de la Vierge, flutters down among the rocks, catches there, flickering in the wind. Then another garment. Then finally another. A flash of lightning bleaches the scene for a moment.

GIRL: I *will* be clean! I *will* be clean once more, just as I was before, just as he thinks of me still!

(Her head is upraised toward the night sky, her hair streaming in the wind. Another flash of lightning reveals her features even more clearly. Her face is definitely the face of the woman who stood at the roulette-table, who earlier stood at the foot of this same rock in a white dress, looking up.)

GIRL (eyes turned upward, in prayer): Forgive me, Holy Mother. For myself, nothing. I have no claim, I make none. But for him—be merciful, have pity. Don't let him hurt too much. Don't let him call my name too much. Don't let him linger alone in the dark too long.

(As she finishes praying, she lowers her head and turns it to give one last look below and behind her, from where she climbed.)

(At the base of the rock, the discarded garments are still lying there where they fell. But now a woman in a spreading white gown is standing there, looking upward toward the top of the rock. Her face expresses horror. A flash of lightning reveals it even more vividly. *Her* face is just as definitely the face of the woman who stood by the roulette-table, and at the foot of this rock the time before.... As she looks, she hears a long-drawn scream, dwindling into the silence, as when someone is falling from a great height. A flash of lightning illuminates the top of the rock once more. It is empty. The woman in white, looking upward, transfixed.)

WOMAN (in a trance-like voice): Which is you? Which is I?

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Walter Tevis is a teacher in Kentucky, has sold a number of stories to leading magazines, and is presently working on a novel about a pool hustler. . . . None of which information gives any hint of the unalloyed charm of this story, about another kind of pool and its magnificently improbable contents.

far from home

by WALTER S. TEVIS

THE FIRST INKLING THE JANITOR had of the miracle was the smell of it. This was a small miracle in itself: the salt smell of kelp and sea water in the Arizona morning air. He had just unlocked the front entrance and walked into the building when the smell hit him. Now this man was old and normally did not trust his senses very well; but there was no mistaking this, not even in this most inland of inland towns: it was the smell of ocean—deep ocean, far out, the ocean of green water, kelp and brine.

And strangely, because the janitor was old and tired and because this was the part of early morning that seems unreal to many old men, the first thing the smell made him feel was a small, almost undetectable thrilling in his old nerves, a memory deeper than blood of a time fifty years before when he had gone once, as a boy, to San Francisco and had watched the ships in the bay and had discovered the fine old dirty smell of sea water. But this feeling lasted only an instant. It was replaced immediately with amazement—and then anger, although it would have been impossible to say with what he was angry, here in this desert town, in the dressing rooms of the large public swimming pool at morning, being reminded of his youth and of the ocean.

"What the hell's going on here . . . ?" the janitor said.

There was no one to hear this, except perhaps the small boy who had been standing outside, staring through the wire fence into the pool and clutching a brown paper sack in one grubby hand, when the janitor had come up to the building. The man had paid

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no attention to the boy; small boys were always around the swimming pool in summer—a nuisance. The boy, if he had heard the man or not, did not reply.

The janitor walked on through the concrete-floored dressing rooms, not even stopping to read the morning's crop of obscenities scribbled on the walls of the little wooden booths. He walked into the tiled anteroom, stepped across the disinfectant foot bath, and out onto the wide concrete edge of the swimming pool itself.

Some things are unmistakable. There was a whale in the pool.

And no ordinary, everyday whale. This was a monumental creature, a whale's whale, a great, blue-gray leviathan, 90 feet long and thirty feet across the back, with a tail the size of a flatcar and a head like the smooth fist of a titan. A blue whale, an old shiny, leathery monster with barnacles on his gray underbelly and his eyes filmed with age and wisdom and myopia, with brown seaweed dribbling from one corner of his mouth, marks of the suckers of squid on his face, and a rusted piece of harpoon sunk in the unconscious blubber of his back. He rested on his belly in the pool, his back way out of the water and with his monstrous gray lips together in an expression of contentment and repose. He was not asleep; but he was asleep enough not to care where he was.

And he stank—with the fine old stink of the sea, the mother of us all; the brackish, barnacled, grainy salt stink of creation and old age, the stink of the world that was and of the world to come. He was beautiful.

The janitor did not freeze when he saw him; he froze a moment afterwards. First he said, aloud, his voice matter-of-fact, "There's a whale in the swimming pool. A God damn whale." He said this to no one—or to everyone—and perhaps the boy heard him, although there was no reply from the other side of the fence.

After speaking, the janitor stood where he was for seven minutes, thinking. He thought of many things, such as what he had eaten for breakfast, what his wife had said to him when she had awakened him that morning. Somewhere, in the corner of his vision, he saw the little boy with the paper sack, and his mind thought, as minds will do at such times, *Now that boy's about six years old. That's probably his lunch in that sack. Egg salad sandwich. Banana. Or apple.* But he did not think about the whale, because there was nothing to be thought about the whale. He stared at its unbelievable bulk, resting calmly, the great head in the deep water under the diving boards, the corner of one tail fluke being lapped gently by the shallow water of the wading pool.

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The whale breathed slowly, deeply, through its blow hole. The janitor breathed slowly, shallowly, staring, not blinking even in the rising sunlight, staring with no comprehension at the eighty-five ton miracle in the swimming pool. The boy held his paper sack tightly at the top, and his eyes, too, remained fixed on the whale. The sun was rising in the sky over the desert to the east, and its light glinted in red and purple iridescence on the oily back of the whale.

And then the whale noticed the janitor. Weak-visioned, it peered at him filmily for several moments from its grotesquely small eye. And then it arched its back in a ponderous, awesome, and graceful movement, lifted its tail twenty feet in the air, and brought it down in a way that seemed strangely slow, slapping gently into the water with it. A hundred gallons of water rose out of the pool, and enough of it drenched the janitor to wake him from the state of partial paralysis into which he had fallen.

Abruptly the janitor jumped back, scrambling from the water, his eyes looking, frightened, in all directions, his lips white. There was nothing to see but the whale and the boy. "All right," he said, "All right," as if he had somehow seen through the plot, as if he knew, now, what a whale would be doing in the public swimming pool, as if no one was going to put anything over on *him*. "All right," the janitor said to the whale, and then he turned and ran.

He ran back into the center of town, back towards Main Street, back towards the bank, where he would find the Chairman of the Board of the City Parks Commission, the man who could, somehow—perhaps with a memorandum—save him. He ran back to the town where things were as they were supposed to be; ran as fast as he had ever run, even when young, to escape the only miracle he would ever see in his life and the greatest of all God's creatures. . . .

After the janitor had left, the boy remained staring at the whale for a long while, his face a mask and his heart racing with all the peculiar excitement of wonder and love—wonder for all whales, and love for the only whale that he, an Arizona boy of six desert years, had ever seen. And then, when he realized that there would be men there soon and his time with his whale would be over, he lifted the paper sack carefully close to his face, and opened its top about an inch, gingerly. A commotion began in the sack, as if a small animal were in it that wanted desperately to get out.

"Stop that!" the boy said, frowning.

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The kicking stopped. From the sack came a voice—a high-pitched, irascible voice, with a Gaelic accent. "All right, whatever-your-name-is," the voice said, "I suppose you're ready for the second one."

The boy held the sack carefully with his thumb and forefinger. He frowned at the opening in the top. "Yes," he said, "I think so . . ."

When the janitor returned with the two other men, the whale was no longer there. Neither was the small boy. But the seaweed smell and the splashed, brackish water were there still, and in the pool were several brownish streamers of seaweed, floating aimlessly in the chlorinated water, far from home.

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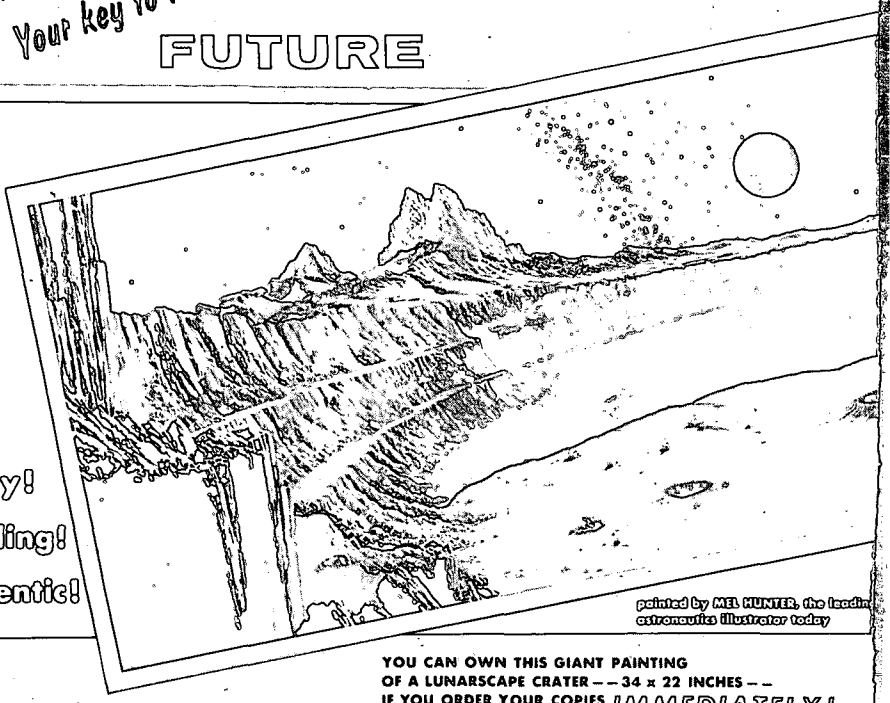

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